

RIGI RETREAT

DRAFT DISCUSSION PAPER II

Regionalization

Background and Context

Regionalization has emerged as a key dimension of treaty body strengthening. It should not, however, be understood as a proposal to relocate the treaty body system or to create a separate regional review mechanism. Its significance lies in its contribution to a broader overhaul of the State party reporting procedure: moving from an episodic, document-heavy and largely Geneva-centred model toward a more predictable, digitally supported, regionally connected and follow-up-oriented review cycle.

In this broader architecture, digitalization provides the information infrastructure. Regionalization brings treaty body engagement closer to States, rights-holders, national implementation actors, NHRIs, civil society, UN country teams and regional presences. Predictable scheduling gives the system the rhythm needed for reviews and follow-up to take place regularly and coherently. The three elements are therefore mutually dependent: digital tools allow information to be shared and reused across Geneva, regional and national levels; regionalization allows that information to be discussed closer to implementation contexts; and predictable scheduling ensures that these interactions are not ad hoc, but part of a regular review-and-follow-up cycle.

Discussions on “regionalization” within the UN human rights treaty body strengthening process emerged prominently in 2020, when the President of the General Assembly mandated Switzerland and Morocco to lead informal consultations with Member States, OHCHR and other stakeholders on the state of the treaty body system. The co-facilitators’ final report (A/75/601) identified the need to bring treaty body processes closer to national and regional levels, recommending that States and treaty bodies explore options for “reviews in regions” to enhance engagement and increase participation by stakeholders facing barriers to Geneva-based reviews (paras. 67–69). This proposal was linked to broader goals of improving the visibility of the system, strengthening national ownership, and deepening interaction with national and regional human rights institutions.

In 2022, the Chairs of the treaty bodies advanced this discussion by endorsing a more structured approach to periodic engagement, agreeing to develop “an eight-year cycle for full reviews with follow-up reviews in between” (34th Chairs’ Conclusions; A/77/228, para. 55). The follow-up reviews, envisioned as short, targeted assessments focusing on up to

four priority issues, were designed to maintain timely engagement between full reviews while managing costs and workloads. The rationale, as elaborated in the OHCHR Working Paper commissioned by the Chairs, is that a predictable cycle anchored by focused follow-up reviews “strikes a balance” between timely engagement on critical issues, cost-effectiveness, and the time and resources required from States and stakeholders (Working Paper, p. 13).

Responding to the Chairs’ mandate, OHCHR prepared its Working Paper on Options and Guiding Questions for an Implementation Plan (29 May 2023), which translates the 2022 conclusions into practical modalities. While not proposing “regional reviews” as an independent reform, the Working Paper situates regionalization within the flexible menu of follow-up review modalities, including

- a) correspondence-based reviews,
- b) hybrid/online dialogues, and
- c) in-situ visits—mechanisms that can increase proximity, accessibility, and participation for States and stakeholders (Working Paper, Section V)

Over the past three annual meetings, the Chairs have progressively discussed regionalization.

- **2023 (35th Chairs’ Meeting, A/78/354):** At their thirty-fifth annual meeting, the Chairs advanced their work on the implementation of the 2022 conclusions by examining in depth the modalities for strengthened follow-up reviews, as set out in the OHCHR Working Paper. The report shows that the Chairs viewed reinforced follow-up procedures, particularly short, targeted assessments, as essential complements to full reviews, allowing for more regular engagement while easing burdens on States (paras. 14, 86). In their formal decisions, the Chairs agreed that follow-up reviews should focus on “up to four specific priority issues” identified during the full review or emerging subsequently (para. 86).

During discussions, the Chairs and stakeholders also referenced innovative decentralized practices, such as the extraordinary Committee on the Rights of the Child session held in Samoa in 2020, as illustrative of alternative modalities that bring treaty body engagement closer to regions (para. 18). Although A/78/354 does not establish “regional reviews” as a formal mechanism, the report highlights States’ concerns regarding the travel and resource constraints faced by small island developing States and least developed countries and stresses the importance of hybrid formats to broaden participation (para. 42; paras. 77–79).

The Chairs further emphasized the value of strengthened cooperation with regional human rights mechanisms to reinforce national follow-up and

implementation (para. 42). Collectively, these elements reflect a careful but tangible movement toward more accessible and targeted engagement modalities, particularly within follow-up review processes, which provide the practical foundations for future geographically proximate or regionally accessible treaty body interactions.

- **2024 (36th Chairs' Meeting, A/79/292):** During their thirty-sixth annual meeting, the Chairs further consolidated the 2022 decision on a predictable eight-year cycle by clarifying and harmonizing the modalities for focused follow-up reviews, which remain the central mechanism through which more accessible or proximate engagement can be achieved.

Building on the 2023 conclusions, which defined follow-up reviews as focused on up to four specific priority issues, the 2024 meeting further clarified the modalities for constructive dialogues, stakeholder engagement and hybrid participation. Although A/79/292 does not establish “regional reviews” as a formal modality, it records a strong emphasis on accessibility and participation, reflecting concerns raised by States, particularly least developed countries and small island developing States, regarding travel and cost barriers to in-person Geneva sessions. In response, the Chairs adopted common modalities allowing SIDS and LDCs to request hybrid or fully online dialogues, and permitting online dialogues for other States only in exceptional circumstances, with a stated preference for hybrid formats over fully remote reviews (paras. 63(a)–(c)).

The Chairs also underlined the importance of strengthening cooperation with regional human rights mechanisms to support national follow-up and enhance coherence across levels of the system (para. 62). Taken together, the 2024 conclusions show that while regional reviews were not formally adopted, the system is increasingly structured around accessible, hybrid, and issue-focused follow-up modalities that pragmatically support more geographically inclusive engagement with States and stakeholders.

- **2025 (37th Chairs' Meeting, A/80/294):** At their thirty-seventh annual meeting in 2025 (A/80/294), held under the severe constraints of the UN liquidity crisis, the Chairs approached questions of regionalization and more accessible engagement mainly through the lens of focused, flexible review modalities and predictable scheduling, rather than by proposing a standalone “regional review” model.

Building on their 2024 conclusions, they requested a simulation for a predictable schedule of reviews for all treaty bodies with reporting mandates, within existing

formula-based resources, explicitly linking it to earlier decisions on postponements and reviews in the absence of a report or delegation (paras. 75–77). The Chairs did not reopen the substantive design of focused follow-up reviews (already defined as targeting up to four priority issues at the 36th meeting), but they refined the supporting procedures, calling for further simplification and streamlining of the simplified reporting procedure, including more concise and coordinated lists of issues prior to reporting (para. 78), and for harmonized modalities for stakeholder submissions during State reviews (para. 79).

In response to the liquidity crisis, they also endorsed a set of exceptional, temporary measures to preserve continuity of the system’s core functions, many of which rely on written and online modalities: intersessional preparation of lists of issues and annual reports by written procedure and “silence procedure”, online or written consultations for general comments, and expanded use of digital tools, including artificial intelligence, to support committee work (para. 70(a)–(f), (g)(i)).

While reaffirming that videoconferencing cannot replace in-person dialogues for core treaty functions (para. 69), the Chairs explicitly envisaged online and hybrid engagement with stakeholders and sought voluntary contributions not only to sustain such formats but also to “facilitate regional consultations” as part of their crisis-response toolbox (para. 70(g)(ii)–(v)).

Taken together, the 2025 conclusions show that, in practice, regionalization is being advanced through the consolidation of predictable, issue-focused procedures and the use of hybrid, written and regionally proximate consultations, rather than via a formal new review tier, an approach shaped as much by accessibility goals as by the need to keep the system functioning under acute resource strain.

Overall trajectory

Viewed as a whole, the period 2020–2025 reveals a clear trajectory.

- **2020:** regionalization entered the strengthening debate through the proposal to explore reviews in regions, with the aim of improving participation, visibility and national ownership (A/75/601, paras. 67–69)
- **2022:** Structural foundation laid through the eight-year cycle with follow-up reviews (A/77/228, para. 55).

- **2023:** Follow-up reviews operationalized; Samoa session referenced; OHCHR Working Paper situates regionalization within flexible modalities; regional pilots acknowledged (A/78/354, paras. 18, 60, 86).
- **2024:** Accessibility becomes institutionalized via hybrid and online modalities; cooperation with regional mechanisms emphasized (A/79/292, paras. 62, 63(a)–(c)).
- **2025:** Regional consultations recognized as an activity that may be supported through voluntary contributions; predictable scheduling maintained under constraint (A/80/294, paras. 70(g)(v), 75–77).

This evolution shows that regionalization has not emerged as a separate reform track. It is better understood as the proximity and implementation dimension of a broader redesign of the treaty body reporting procedure. Its strategic value lies in bringing treaty body engagement closer to the actors, institutions and contexts responsible for implementation, while keeping that engagement connected to the formal authority of the Committees and the discipline of a predictable review cycle.

Feasibility of regionalization and regionally proximate follow-up reviews

Assessing the feasibility of regionalization requires distinguishing between formal “regional reviews”, which the Chairs have not endorsed as a new mechanism, and the more incremental but tangible shift toward regionally proximate forms of treaty body engagement. The latter is both conceptually viable and practically achievable.

For the purposes of the broader treaty body overhaul, feasibility should not be assessed only in terms of whether meetings can take place outside Geneva. The more important question is whether regionalization can support the wider reform architecture: predictable scheduling, digitally connected information flows and sustained follow-up between reviews.

From the perspective of the Geneva Human Rights Hub, regionalization is feasible in principle, but conditionally. Its feasibility rests on five reinforcing dimensions: structural feasibility, operational feasibility, technical and accessibility feasibility, political and resource feasibility, and normative feasibility.

Structural Feasibility: predictable cycles and focused follow-up reviews

The eight-year predictable cycle with follow-up reviews in between (A/77/228, para. 55) provides the primary structural anchor for regionalization. Follow-up reviews - targeted on up to four priority issues (A/78/354, para. 86) - are shorter, less resource-intensive, and inherently more flexible than full reviews, making them the natural modality through which regional engagement could occur.

The OHCHR Working Paper (29 May 2023) reinforces this feasibility by identifying three modalities for follow-up reviews that directly support regionally proximate engagement:

- correspondence-based reviews, reducing reliance on physical presence;
- hybrid/online dialogue formats, enabling remote participation across time zones;
- in-situ visits, the most geographically proximate form of engagement.

While the Working Paper does not label these as “regional reviews,” it clearly situates region-based interaction within the existing mandate framework and within the treaty bodies’ rules of procedure, meaning no new GA resolution is required to operationalize them.

Thus, from a structural perspective, regionalization is fully feasible within current mandates, provided it is implemented through follow-up reviews rather than through a new formal review tier.

Operational Feasibility: demonstrated practices and regional pilot experiences

The most relevant examples include:

- **CRC 84th Extraordinary Session in Samoa (2020):** the first treaty body session held in the Pacific, signalling that full treaty body engagement can be conducted effectively in a regional setting.
- **Treaty Body Follow-Up Review Pilot Series (2021–2024):** national pilots in Sierra Leone and Grenada, and a regional follow-up review in the Pacific, each showing that context-specific and locally embedded dialogue can strengthen follow-up and enhance the relevance of treaty body recommendations.
- **CEDAW Pacific Technical Cooperation Session (2025):** demonstrating that substantive treaty body engagement, including joint capacity-building and follow-up discussions, can be organized regionally with strong participation and national ownership.

The Pacific Follow-Up Review Pilot and the CEDAW Pacific Technical Cooperation Session are particularly relevant because they highlight the strategic value of UN regional hubs, such as the UN Human Rights Pacific Regional Office in Suva. These hubs can serve as natural convening spaces for regional follow-up reviews. They often possess the logistical capacity, technical expertise and established networks with governments, NHRIs, civil society and UN country teams necessary to support treaty body engagement.

Their added value is not only logistical. Regional hubs can reduce travel burdens, facilitate multi-State participation and ensure better integration with ongoing UN country and regional programming. Their proximity to national actors can foster richer, more continuous dialogue and provide an enabling environment for joined-up, regionally grounded follow-up. In this sense, regional hubs could serve as practical platforms for operationalizing regionally based follow-up reviews on a more sustainable basis.

Table: Key UN Regional Hubs Relevant for Treaty Body Regionalization

Region	City / Hub	Main UN Entities Present	Why Relevant for Regionalization
Pacific	Suva (Fiji)	OHCHR Regional Office for Pacific; UNDP; UNICEF; UN Women; UNFPA; ESCAP Sub-Regional Office	<i>Primary Pacific UN hub; strong OHCHR presence; proven capacity (CRC Samoa support, CEDAW 2025 session, GHRP Pacific Follow-Up Review); major regional airport; strong regional networks (SPC, PIFS).</i>
South-East Asia	Bangkok (Thailand)	OHCHR Regional Office; ESCAP HQ; UNDP Regional Hub; UN Women; UNICEF; UNFPA	<i>Largest UN hub in Asia; major global transit point; extensive conference facilities; existing ESCAP intergovernmental mechanisms.</i>
Eastern & Southern Africa	Nairobi (Kenya)	UNON (one of three UN HQs); OHCHR Regional Presence; UNDP; UNICEF; UNEP HQ; UN-Habitat HQ	<i>One of the biggest UN hubs worldwide; superior conference infrastructure; excellent African connectivity; long experience hosting multi-country human rights and governance workshops.</i>
West Africa	Dakar (Senegal)	OHCHR Regional Office; UNDP Hub;	<i>Major UN presence for Francophone Africa; regional air hub; established venue for</i>

Region	City / Hub	Main UN Entities Present	Why Relevant for Regionalization
		UNICEF; UN Women; UNFPA	<i>human rights consultations; strong civil society ecosystem.</i>
Southern Africa	Pretoria/Johannesburg (South Africa)	OHCHR Regional Office; UNDP; UNICEF; UN Women; UNFPA	<i>Significant UN presence; Johannesburg is the continent's largest air hub; suitable for SADC-based reviews.</i>
Middle East & North Africa	Amman (Jordan)	UNDP Regional Hub; UNICEF Regional Office; UN Women; OHCHR (Middle East presence via Beirut & Doha)	<i>Central travel hub for MENA; strong UN country team platforms; deep experience in cross-border regional programming.</i>
MENA / Gulf	Doha (Qatar)	OHCHR Training & Documentation Centre; UN House presence	<i>State-of-the-art facilities; strong OHCHR anchoring; increasing role as diplomatic and multilateral host.</i>
Latin America & Caribbean	Panama City (Panama)	UNDP Regional Hub; UNICEF Regional Office; UN Women; UNFPA; OHCHR Regional Office (Central America)	<i>Main UN regional coordination hub for LAC; excellent conference infrastructure; major air connectivity for the Americas.</i>
Latin America (South Cone)	Santiago de Chile	OHCHR Regional Office; ECLAC HQ	<i>High-level intergovernmental conference centre; strong human rights expertise; regional accessibility within South America.</i>
Europe & Central Asia	Geneva (Switzerland)	OHCHR, 40 UN entities, UNECE as regional hub	<i>Human Rights Headquarters of the UN, High-level intergovernmental conference centre; strong human rights expertise; regional accessibility within Europe.</i>
Europe & Central Asia	Istanbul (Türkiye)	UNDP Regional Hub; UN Women; UNFPA; UNICEF; IOM	<i>Major international hub; strategically positioned between Europe and Asia; large-scale UN meeting infrastructure.</i>

Region	City / Hub	Main UN Entities Present	Why Relevant for Regionalization
Central Asia	Almaty (Kazakhstan)	ESCAP Subregional Office; multiple UN agencies	<i>Strong subregional convening space; improving connections; useful for Central Asian follow-up clusters.</i>

This table should be understood as illustrative rather than exhaustive. Its purpose is not to prescribe a fixed map of regional reviews, but to show that the UN already has regional infrastructures that could support more proximate treaty body engagement if mandates, procedures and resources are clarified.

The Chairs' decisions in 2024 (A/79/292, paras. 63(a)–(c)) and the emergency measures adopted in 2025 (A/80/294, para. 70(a)–(f)) significantly increase the feasibility of regionally proximate engagement by institutionalizing:

- hybrid dialogues, which reduce travel burdens for SIDS and LDCs;
- online participation in exceptional circumstances;
- written procedures for core outputs;
- digital support tools, including those drawing on artificial intelligence, for managing documentation and coordinating workflows (A/80/294, para. 70(g)(i)).

These measures lower the transaction costs associated with traditional Geneva-based reviews and create conditions where regional or subregional follow-up discussions can be supplemented, prepared, or partially conducted through remote technologies.

This is where regionalization connects directly to Paper I on digitalization. Regional engagement can only be effective if it is linked to structured, searchable and reusable information. Digital platforms can allow stakeholders to access relevant materials before regional consultations, enable remote participation for actors unable to travel, connect regional discussions to treaty body records, and ensure that information generated regionally feeds back into formal review and follow-up.

The Chairs' explicit reference in 2025 to facilitating regional consultations (A/80/294, para. 70(g)(v)) further reinforces that technologically enabled, regionally anchored engagement is both feasible and institutionally recognized. However, accessibility must be treated as a condition of feasibility, not as an afterthought. Regionalization should reduce barriers to participation, including for SIDS, LDCs, persons with disabilities, low-bandwidth users,

civil society organizations and rights-holders who may not be able to engage meaningfully through Geneva-based processes.

Normative Feasibility: consistency with mandates and human rights principles

Regionalization is consistent with the treaty bodies' normative mandates if it strengthens participation, accessibility, equal treatment and implementation. The Chairs' reports repeatedly highlight the importance of equal treatment of all States, the need to reduce structural barriers faced by SIDS, LDCs and remote States, and the imperative to ensure participation and inclusion.

Regionally proximate engagement advances these objectives. It can make the treaty body system more accessible to States and stakeholders that face practical barriers to Geneva-based participation. It can bring follow-up closer to NHRIs, civil society, rights-holders, local actors, national implementation mechanisms and UN country teams. It can also improve the quality of implementation dialogue by situating discussions closer to the realities in which recommendations are implemented. At the same time, regionalization must be designed in a way that preserves the universality, independence and coherence of the treaty body system. It should not create different standards across regions, unequal access to Committee attention or political pressure on treaty body engagement at the regional or national level. Nor should it dilute the collegiality of Committees or fragment their working methods.

The normative test is therefore clear: regionalization is feasible and desirable if it brings the treaty body system closer to rights-holders and implementation actors while preserving the authority, independence, universality and equal treatment that define the treaty body system.

Political and Resource Feasibility: conditions and constraints

Regionalization is feasible within existing mandates and practice, but its sustainability depends on predictable resourcing and political will.

The Chairs' repeated calls for a conclusive biennial General Assembly resolution (A/79/292, paras. 53–55) underline the point. Regional engagements can be piloted or supported through voluntary funding, and this may be useful for testing models and demonstrating value. However, full implementation of the predictable cycle and follow-up reviews, within which regionalization would meaningfully occur, requires adequate regular budget support.

In the absence of such resourcing, regionalization may still occur, but only in ad hoc or pilot form, supported by voluntary contributions, regional partners or development actors. This is useful, but insufficient for systemic reform. If regionalization is to become part of a predictable review-and-follow-up cycle, it will require stable support for Secretariat preparation, treaty body member participation, travel, interpretation, accessibility, security, documentation and coordination with UN regional and country presences.

Politically, regionalization is attractive because it responds to concerns about accessibility, ownership, visibility and implementation. It is particularly relevant for SIDS, LDCs and geographically remote States, for which Geneva-based engagement can be costly and difficult. At the same time, it should not be presented as a low-cost alternative to Geneva. In many cases, it shifts costs from States and stakeholders to the system itself. The political case should therefore be framed around effectiveness and implementation, not only savings.

In sum, politically and financially, feasibility is conditional. Regionalization is achievable, but its scale, regularity and credibility depend on sustainable institutional backing.

Overall Feasibility Assessment

Regionalization, understood as proximity-based engagement embedded within follow-up reviews, is structurally possible, operationally tested, technologically supported and normatively compelling. It does not require the creation of a new treaty body mechanism or a parallel regional review system. Its feasibility lies in using existing mandates and emerging working methods to bring parts of the review-and-follow-up cycle closer to implementation contexts.

The approach is feasible in practice if five enabling conditions are met:

1. **Clear procedural anchoring:** regionalization could be linked primarily to the follow-up phase of a predictable review cycle, with clarity on the status, purpose and outputs of each form of engagement.
2. **Digital connectivity:** regional engagement should draw on and feed back into the same information systems used for treaty body reporting, recommendations and follow-up.
3. **Institutional safeguards:** regionalization must preserve the authority, independence, collegiality and consistency of the treaty bodies, while avoiding fragmented or uneven practices.
4. **Regional partnerships:** OHCHR regional presences, UN country teams, regional organizations, NMIRFs, NHRIs and civil society should be engaged in ways that support implementation without replacing treaty body assessment.

5. **Sustained resourcing:** regional consultations and follow-up reviews require predictable support for staffing, travel, interpretation, accessibility, security and preparation.

Regionalization is therefore feasible, but not self-executing. It requires more than holding meetings outside Geneva. Its strategic importance lies in the fact that it can provide the proximity and implementation layer of the broader overhaul of the treaty body reporting procedure. Without digitalization, regionalization risks becoming disconnected from the formal information base of the system. Without predictable scheduling, it risks remaining ad hoc. With digital infrastructure and a predictable review cycle, regionalization can help make treaty body engagement more continuous, accessible and implementation-oriented.

Potential questions for discussion

- **Should regionalization be understood as formal “reviews in regions”, or as a broader set of regionally proximate engagement modalities linked to follow-up?**
- Should follow-up reviews be the primary procedural vehicle for regional engagement, given their focused and flexible nature?
- Which parts of the treaty body cycle are most suitable for regionalization: full reviews, follow-up reviews, stakeholder consultations, capacity-building, implementation dialogues, or regional consultations?
- **How can regionalization be linked to the same information base, procedural standards and follow-up expectations as Geneva-based reviews?**
- What role should OHCHR regional presences, UN country teams, resident coordinators and regional human rights mechanisms play in supporting regionally proximate engagement?
- How can regionalization strengthen participation by NHRIs, civil society, rights-holders, national implementation mechanisms and local actors?
- **What safeguards are needed to ensure that regionalization does not compromise the authority, independence, collegiality or consistency of treaty bodies?**
- How can digitalization support regional consultations, national follow-up discussions and the transmission of information back to the formal treaty body process?
- Which regional hubs or UN presences would be best placed to pilot regionally proximate follow-up reviews, and according to what criteria?
- How should regionalization be financed, and what should be the balance between regular budget support, voluntary contributions and partnerships?
- **What elements of regionalization, follow-up modalities and regional support structures should be included in a future General Assembly resolution?**

