

*In March 2011, a brand new Working Group on Discrimination Against Women in Law and Practice was established. Keep an eye out for its first areas of focus and email information to the Working Group at [wqdiscriminationwomen@ohchr.org](mailto:wqdiscriminationwomen@ohchr.org).*

#### 4. Universal Periodic Review

This is where the Human Rights Council examines each UN member state on its overall human rights record, considering all human rights treaties which the country has signed.

All NGO comments are consolidated into one document by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, but again it might be useful for a few NGOs to submit joint comments. Just send a letter, preferably easily set out with bullet points. Addresses and further information about NGO participation can be found here: [www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/UPR/Pages/NgosNhris.aspx](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/UPR/Pages/NgosNhris.aspx)

Recommendations following the review can be accessed here: [www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/UPR/Pages/Documentation.aspx](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/UPR/Pages/Documentation.aspx), but it can take several months for them to become available, so if any colleagues are in Geneva at the time, perhaps you could ask them to take advance notes.

Check here to see when your country will be reviewed: [www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/UPR/Pages/UPRSessions.aspx](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/UPR/Pages/UPRSessions.aspx).

#### 5. General Complaint Procedures

You can also submit information through the Commission on the Status of Women's communication procedure [www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/communications\\_procedure.html](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/communications_procedure.html) and the Human Rights Council's complaint procedure [www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/chr/complaints.htm](http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/chr/complaints.htm)

All you have to do is write a simple letter to the relevant body with the facts and the CSW or HRC will forward that to your government for a response. Since these procedures are confidential, you won't get any official feedback about your complaint, but your letter can provoke some action from the government nevertheless and it helps to keep the issue at the forefront.

#### African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights

You can send information to the Commission, which periodically examines each State party on its compliance with its obligations under the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and the Protocol on the Rights of Women [http://www.achpr.org/english/info/state\\_procedure\\_en.html](http://www.achpr.org/english/info/state_procedure_en.html) If your NGO has 'observer status' with the Commission, you may speak at the open session, which means your oral submission become part of the session's proceedings.. Find out how to obtain 'observer status' here: [www.achpr.org/english/info/observer\\_en.html](http://www.achpr.org/english/info/observer_en.html)

You can submit information to the **Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa**, who acts as a focal point for the Commission on human rights issues affecting women under both the Charter and the Protocol on the Rights of Women. Further information is here: [www.achpr.org/english/info/index\\_women\\_en.html](http://www.achpr.org/english/info/index_women_en.html)

The African Commission also has an **individual complaints procedure**. All domestic remedies must have been exhausted and the complaint cannot be under consideration or settled in another forum. A guide to this process is here: [www.achpr.org/english/info/guidelines\\_communications\\_en.html](http://www.achpr.org/english/info/guidelines_communications_en.html)

Do also have a look at [A Guide to Using the Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa for Legal Action](#), newly published by Equality Now and Solidarity for African Women's Rights (SOAWR).



## A Quick Guide to Reporting Human Rights Violations to the United Nations and the African Commission

July 2011

Equality Now would be very pleased to guide newcomers around the reporting system if that would help. We could also provide more specific technical assistance if needed. In the meantime, we hope this pocket guide will be of use.

[www.equalitynow.org](http://www.equalitynow.org)

There are several ways for NGOs to bring human rights violations to the attention of the United Nations and regional bodies such as the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. Here are the most common.

### United Nations reporting options:

#### 1. Reporting to the treaty bodies (Committees)

You can submit information to the Committee overseeing the international human rights treaties your government has ratified. Your government is obliged to submit a report to each of these Committees every number of years, and as part of this process, NGOs may submit their own 'shadow reports', which critique the government's report and/or highlight issues that have not been raised by the government.

For issues of discrimination and violence against women, many people choose to go first to the CEDAW Committee, because the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women has the most specific provisions dealing with women's rights. However, many of the other Committees are now placing a greater focus on women's rights so it's worth considering sending information to these too if you think that will help your campaign.

Each of the Committees has its own website, which you can access here: [www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/Pages/HumanRightsBodies.aspx](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/Pages/HumanRightsBodies.aspx)

#### Tips:

(a) Check whether your country is a party to the relevant Convention. Just click here: [www1.umn.edu/humanrts/research/ratification-index.html](http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/research/ratification-index.html)

(b) Study the provisions of the Convention to see what breach has occurred – it helps if you can point the Committee in the right direction – but check also whether your country has made any Reservations which mean that certain parts of the

Convention do not apply: [www.bayefsky.com/docs.php/area/reservations](http://www.bayefsky.com/docs.php/area/reservations)

(c) See when your country is coming up for review [www2.ohchr.org/SPdocs/Status/StateConsidered\\_2011-2012.xls](http://www2.ohchr.org/SPdocs/Status/StateConsidered_2011-2012.xls) and when the deadline is for NGOs to submit information (see individual Committee websites).

(d) Any NGO may submit information, but it is often better if a few NGOs submit a report together. This helps the Committee digest a lot of information more easily and gives it confidence that the information is of serious concern to many in the country.

(e) If your country is a party to several different UN Conventions, you can send the same information to all relevant Committees, tailored to the specific provisions in each Convention you claim are being breached. Addresses for each of the Committees can be found on the Committee websites.

(e) NGOs can attend parts of the meetings when their government is being reviewed in Geneva. Even if you aren't able to go, you will be able to access the report the government has submitted on the website of the relevant Committee and in due course you will also be able to see the report of the discussion on the Committee's website. This provides very useful information with which to hold the government accountable in later advocacy.

#### 2. Individual Communications

Five Conventions have individual complaints procedures attached, but your country must have signed up to separately to the following:

- **Human Rights Committee:** First Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
- **CEDAW:** Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women

- **CAT:** Article 22 of the Convention Against Torture
- **CERD:** Article 14 of the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
- **CRPD:** Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Check your country's ratifications here: [www.bayefsky.com/bystate.php](http://www.bayefsky.com/bystate.php)

Ordinarily, you must exhaust all available domestic remedies before lodging a complaint, and the complaint must not be under consideration by any other international or regional human rights body. More information is available here:

[www.bayefsky.com/unts/index.html](http://www.bayefsky.com/unts/index.html) ; [www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/petitions/individual.htm](http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/petitions/individual.htm).

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women and the Committee Against Torture also have the power to initiate **confidential inquiries** into grave and systematic human rights violations. For information on how to apply, see here: [www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/petitions/index.htm#inquiry](http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/petitions/index.htm#inquiry)

#### 3. UN Mandate Holders

You can submit information at any time to the individual experts tasked with looking at particular issues, such as the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, the Special Rapporteur on Trafficking or the Special Rapporteur on Housing, for example. There are also several Rapporteurs who focus on the human rights situation in a particular country, currently including Sudan, Somalia and Burundi.

Further information about all of the UN mandate holders and contact details are here: [www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/chr/special/theses.htm](http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/chr/special/theses.htm) and <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/chr/special/countries.htm>