

# Guidelines for the preparation of reports to the treaty bodies by Member States

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## I. Background

1. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) provides expertise and support to the different human rights monitoring mechanisms in the United Nations system. These mechanisms include UN Charter-based bodies and treaty-based bodies established under the human rights treaties.
2. Treaty-based bodies derive their existence from provisions contained in a specific legal instrument, and hold specific mandates. The set of issues are codified in the legal instrument, and address those States parties that have ratified the legal instrument. Decision-making is based on consensus.
3. Nine monitoring committees oversee the implementation of the treaty provisions of their respective convention. The bodies, composed of independent experts, meet to consider the reports of States parties, as well as individual complaints or communications. They may also publish general comments on human rights topics relating to the treaties they oversee. In addition to the work of the committees, meetings of the States parties are also held. Treaty-based bodies tend to follow similar patterns of documentation.
4. The treaty body strengthening initiative launched by OHCHR in 2009 generated a momentum that led to the adoption by the General Assembly of its landmark resolution 68/268 on 14 April 2014, on strengthening and enhancing the effective functioning of the human rights treaty body system.
5. Pursuant to General Assembly resolutions 52/118 and 53/138, in 2009 the Secretary-General compiled in a single volume a set of guidelines regarding the form and content of reports to be submitted by States parties (HRI/GEN/2/Rev.6), including information on reporting requirements, the core document and treaty-specific documents. The guidelines are updated on a regular basis.

## II. Context

6. All United Nations documents bearing the United Nations logo and an official document number ("symbol") should be submitted in accordance with the instructions provided in the United Nations Editorial Manual Online (<http://dd.dgacm.org/editorialmanual/index.htm>), which is intended to serve as an authoritative statement of the style to be followed in drafting, editing and reproducing official documents. Documents received from Member States are formatted by treaty body secretariats, which will insert the United Nations masthead and the document symbol. To facilitate the formatting process, Member States are invited to note the following United Nations editorial directives.

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## III. Editorial tips from the UNOG Editing Section

7. When drafting a document:
  - Be concise
  - Be clear and direct whenever possible, using concrete rather than abstract words
  - Spell out all acronyms, and use them sparingly
  - Organize your text to have one idea in each paragraph
  - Define keywords/terms in advance to avoid inconsistency, especially if writing collaboratively
  - Avoid repetition, and consider whether the same thing could be said in fewer words
  - Use emphasis sparingly

## IV. Basic information

### A. Word limits

8. Word limitations include all elements of the document (cover page, table of contents, footnotes and annexes). Documents are classified in two categories:
  - (a) Documents with word limits as recommended by the treaty bodies and endorsed by the General Assembly in its resolution 68/268:

Initial State party report:	31,800 words
Subsequent periodic State party reports:	21,200 words
Common core documents:	42,400 words
  - (b) Documents with recommended word limits  
Replies to list of issues: timely submitted replies that do not exceed 10,700 words will be scheduled for processing within 28 days. Longer documents will require an extended processing timeline.

### B. Cover page

9. Member States are requested to clearly identify their reports by including the following information:
  - State party name
  - Committee name
  - Type of report
  - Name of the Ministry submitting the report
  - Name of the drafter (with contact details)
  - Date of the finalization of the report
10. During the formatting process by the relevant treaty body secretariat, an official cover page bearing the UN logo, symbol and other elements based on the information provided above will be included.

### C. Language

11. Documents must be drafted and submitted in one of the six official languages of the United Nations: Arabic, Chinese, English, French Russian or Spanish.

### D. Fonts, bold text and italics

- Times New Roman 10 should be used as prime font for the text and the paragraph numbering

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- Main headings and subheadings should be indicated in bold print (see below)
- Do not use italics or bold text for emphasis
- Italics may be used for foreign words

### E. Headings and subheadings<sup>1</sup>

12. All headings at a given level should have a similar grammatical structure and follow a logical hierarchy. At each level of the hierarchy below the title, if only one subheading is provided, that heading should be either omitted or incorporated in the next-higher-level heading (if there is an "A" heading, there must also be a "B"). Chapter or main section headings are identified by Roman numerals and first-degree subheadings by capital letters:

**Chapter I**  
**Activities of the Special Representative**

**A. Meetings with the parties (12-pt bold)**

**I. Geneva meeting (10-pt bold)**

### F. Paragraphs and subparagraphs

13. In United Nations documents, to ensure that references and cross-references are identical in all language versions, the paragraphs are normally numbered consecutively, with Arabic numerals. Subparagraphs should also be numbered:

Subparagraphs should be identified in the following way:

First degree: (a), (b), (c) etc.

(French and Spanish: a), b), c) etc.)

Second degree: (i), (ii), (iii) etc.

(French and Spanish: i), ii), iii) etc.)

### G. In the text

- Only a single space should be inserted after closing punctuation, colons and semicolons
- No special formats should be applied to quoted matter in the text or to bibliographies
- Avoid inserting text boxes
- Do not insert page breaks between headings and subheadings
- Do not leave empty lines between paragraphs
- Use columns or tables to align words or characters, not the tab key or the spacebar
- The letters "I" and "O" should not be used as substitutes for the numerals 1 (one) and 0 (zero)
- Use Arabic numerals
- Avoid adding two titles of the same level without any text between them

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<sup>1</sup> <http://dd.dgacm.org/editorialmanual/ed-guidelines/format/headings.htm>.

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- Do not copy text from the Convention or from the secretariat document; insert a reference instead
- In reports submitted in response to a list of issues prior to reporting, if there is no answer under an item, do not delete the item, but insert “No information under this item”

### H. Abbreviations and acronyms<sup>2</sup>

14. Abbreviations and acronyms should be used sparingly. They are not to be used for names or titles that occur only once or twice in a text. When used, they should always be spelled out. A list of acronyms may be included at the beginning of the document.

### I. Maps and figures<sup>3</sup>

15. Maps and figures (such as tables, charts or graphs) should be submitted in a digital format that can be imported into Microsoft Word. Text relevant to the maps or figures must be placed outside them, where it will be visible during computer-assisted translation. Embedded maps or figures that are not compatible with Microsoft Word may not be visible in the final electronic version of the document to the United Nations Official Document System (ODS). Embedded images will not be translated.

### J. Footnotes<sup>4</sup>

16. All notes to the text should be prepared as footnotes, not endnotes. The automatic footnote function of Word must be used.

### K. Numbers<sup>5</sup>

17. Numbers under 10 are generally expressed in words (“eight”, not “8”).
18. Ordinal numbers from first to ninety-ninth are expressed in words for most purposes:
- “She was the tenth candidate on the roster”
  - To indicate sessions of most United Nations bodies: the fifty-seventh session of the General Assembly; the thirty-fourth session of the Statistical Commission

For numbers higher than 99, figures are used:

- The 400th anniversary of continuous human settlement in Bermuda
  - The 127th regular session of the Council of the League of Arab States
19. Do not use superscript at the end of the numbers (“127<sup>th</sup>”, not “127<sup>th</sup>”).
20. Roman numerals are normally used to identify:
- Chapters in documents (Chapter V, but Section A)
  - Annexes, appendices, enclosures and attachments to documents: annex I; attachment II
  - Tables or figures (such as charts or graphs) in documents: table II, chart VIII

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<sup>2</sup> <http://dd.dgacm.org/editorialmanual/ed-guidelines/style/abbreviations.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> <http://dd.dgacm.org/editorialmanual/ed-guidelines/format/maps.htm>.

<sup>4</sup> [http://dd.dgacm.org/editorialmanual/ed-guidelines/footnotes/footnotes\\_chap\\_02.htm](http://dd.dgacm.org/editorialmanual/ed-guidelines/footnotes/footnotes_chap_02.htm).

<sup>5</sup> <http://dd.dgacm.org/editorialmanual/ed-guidelines/style/numbers-dates-time.htm>.

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### V. Replies to lists of issues and follow-up to concluding observations

21. Refer to the models at [www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/Pages/tb-documentation-tools.aspx](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/Pages/tb-documentation-tools.aspx).
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