

venting possible violations of the rights to life, physical and mental integrity and security of person.

**State Party:** A State party to a treaty is a State which has formally consented to be bound by the terms of the treaty.

**Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities:** The Sub-Commission was established in 1946 as a subsidiary body of the Commission on Human Rights. It is currently comprised of 26 independent experts nominated by Member States and elected by the Commission for a period of four years. The Sub-Commission meets annually for four weeks in August in Geneva. Its mandate permits the Sub-Commission to consider country situations, propose standards and conduct studies on human rights issues. The Sub-Commission presently has four Working Groups; each meets, generally for a week, before the annual session of the Sub-Commission. The Working Group on Communications meets in closed session to make recommendations to the Sub-Commission on the confidential 1503 procedure. The other three Working Groups are on Indigenous Populations, Contemporary Forms of Slavery, and Minorities. The Sub-Commission and the latter three Working Groups are open to NGOs in consultative status with ECOSOC, whose representatives may attend meetings and make oral or written statements.

**Succession:** see *Ratification*.

**Third Committee:** see *General Assembly*.

**Treaty Bodies:** Each of the six major human rights treaties reviewed in this report have established a committee of independent experts (i.e., a treaty body) mandated to receive and review reports from States parties concerning their efforts to implement their treaty obligations under the convention.

(a) **Committee Against Torture (CAT)** (\*\*Fact Sheet No. 17)

CAT oversees the implementation of the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, which entered into force on 26 June 1987. The Committee met for the first time in April 1988 and is made up of 10 experts who must be nationals of states parties. Members are elected by the states parties for a term of four years and are eligible for re-election. The Committee normally holds two regular sessions each year (May and November); special sessions may be convened by the Committee at the request of a majority of the states parties. The tasks of the Committee include: examining the reports of states parties, which are required to report to CAT every four years on the measures they have taken towards implementing the Convention; receiving information and instituting inquiries concerning allegations of systematic practice of torture in states parties, subject to a declaration by states under article 20 of the Convention; responding to inter-state complaints under article 21,

as necessary; under article 22, receiving and considering complaints from or on behalf of individuals; and cooperating with the Special Rapporteur on the question of torture, appointed by the Commission on Human Rights. The Committee may make confidential inquiries into reliably-attested practices of torture in States, and it has developed an urgent action procedure to respond to cases where individuals are under threat of torture. There is also the possibility of cooperating on a limited basis with the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture, established under the European Convention for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

(b) **Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR)** (\*\*Fact Sheet No. 16, Rev.1)

CESCR was established in 1985 by a resolution of ECOSOC to monitor the effective implementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), which entered into force on 3 January 1976. CESCR met for the first time in 1987. The Committee meets twice a year (April and November) in three week sessions in Geneva. It is comprised of 18 independent experts elected by States parties for a four-year term; members may be re-elected. Under its reporting guidelines, the Committee has identified seven key objectives related to States' reporting obligations: ensuring a comprehensive review of national legislation, administrative rules and procedures, and practices; ensuring regular monitoring of the actual situation with respect to the Covenant rights; provision of a basis for government policies for implementation of the ICESCR; facilitation of public scrutiny of government policies with respect to implementation; provision of a basis on which both the government and the Committee can effectively evaluate progress; enabling governments to develop a better understanding of problems and shortcomings impeding realization of Covenant rights; and facilitation of the exchange of information among states parties in terms of both common problems and possible solutions in the realization of Covenant rights. In cases where states' reports are long overdue, the Committee may decide to consider the situation in the country concerned without a report and informs the government of that decision.

From time to time the Committee prepares "general comments" on the rights and provisions contained in the Covenant with the aim of assisting states parties in fulfilling their reporting obligations and providing greater interpretative clarity as to the intent, meaning and content of the Covenant. At each of its sessions, the Committee holds a day of general discussion on particular provisions of the Covenant, particular human rights themes or other themes of direct relevance. Such discussions have focussed on: the right to food, the right to housing, economic and social indicators, the right to take part in cultural life, the rights of the aging and the elderly, the right to health, the