

the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and its Optional Protocols.

**Land and People or the core document:** To facilitate the reporting process for States parties to international human rights instruments, the treaty-bodies have prepared consolidated guidelines for the development of a “core document” or country profile. The document is also referred to as “Land and people”, the title of the first section of the core document.

**Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR):** The OHCHR is the UN office with principal responsibility for UN human rights activities under the direction and authority of the Secretary-General. The post of High Commissioner for Human Rights (HCHR) was established by General Assembly resolution 48/141 of 20 December 1993, after the idea was strongly endorsed in the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action (VDPA) of the World Conference on Human Rights (Vienna, June 1993). In September 1997, in the context of the programme for reform of the United Nations, the OHCHR and the Centre for Human Rights (formerly the Geneva secretariat for the UN’s human rights procedures and machinery) were consolidated into a single Office. The mandate of the OHCHR is to: (a) promote universal enjoyment of all human rights by giving practical effect to the will and resolve of the world community as expressed by the United Nations; (b) play the leading role on human rights issues and emphasize the importance of human rights at the international and national levels; (c) promote international cooperation for human rights; (d) stimulate and coordinate action for human rights throughout the United Nations system; (e) promote universal ratification and implementation of international standards; (f) assist in the development of new norms; (g) support human rights organs and treaty monitoring bodies; (h) respond to serious violations of human rights; (i) undertake preventive human rights action; (j) promote the establishment of national human rights infrastructures; (k) undertake human rights field activities and operations; and (l) provide education, information advisory services and technical assistance in the field of human rights.

**Optional Protocol (OP):** An optional protocol to a treaty is a multilateral agreement that States parties can ratify or accede to, intended to further a specific purpose of the treaty or to assist in the implementation of its provisions. There are two optional protocols to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The first permits individuals who live in a State that has ratified the OP to submit a complaint to the Human Rights Committee (which monitors the Convention) when they believe their rights have been violated and they have exhausted all domestic remedies. The second seeks the abolition of death penalty. There are also working groups currently drafting optional protocols to permit individual complaint procedures under the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, and two optional protocols to the Convention on

the Rights of the Child – one related to the sale of children, and one related to children in armed conflict.

**Ratification, accession and succession** are all terms that indicate that a State has formally become a State party to a treaty. The primary difference in these three terms has to do with the way that the treaty has been approved. **Ratification** indicates that the treaty has been approved by a State’s governing bodies. A State is not bound by a convention that it has signed but not ratified. **Accession** means simply that a State has agreed to be bound by the terms of the treaty. **Succession** means that a newly-formed State has agreed to inherit the treaty obligations of its predecessor. For example, when Czechoslovakia ceased to exist, its successor States, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, each succeeded to the human rights treaties that Czechoslovakia had ratified earlier.

**Reservation:** A reservation is a unilateral statement formally made by a State upon signing, ratifying or acceding to an agreement. A State makes a reservation when it intends to modify or limit the effect of certain treaty provisions on that particular State. For example, a State may ratify a treaty but also say that it refuses to be bound by a specific provision in that treaty.

**Security Council (SC):** one of the six major organs of the UN, with the primary function of maintaining international peace and security. Currently, membership in the SC comprises 15 member States, five of which (China, France, Russia, United Kingdom and United States) are permanent members and have veto power. In recent years, as the link between human rights violations and violent conflict has been unequivocally established, the SC has become increasingly concerned with matters of human rights. For example, it was the Security Council which established the ad hoc International Criminal Tribunals on former Yugoslavia and Rwanda.

**Special Mechanisms:** The Commission on Human Rights has established a number of extra-conventional procedures and mechanisms – working groups, special rapporteurs, special representatives, independent experts – either to examine, monitor and publicly report on human rights situations in specific countries or territories (country mechanisms or mandates) or on major phenomena of human rights violations worldwide (thematic mechanisms or mandates). The system of special procedures is on the frontline of international monitoring of universal human rights standards and addresses many of the most serious violations in the most critical situations. Each procedure has its own specific mandate and has developed its own methods of work although certain basic principles and criteria are common to all. They have as a central objective to render international human rights norms more operative through, *inter alia*: entering into constructive dialogues with governments and seeking the cooperation of governments with regard to concrete situations, incidents and individual cases. Urgent action procedures are used on a regular basis when there remains the hope of pre-