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United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women

*United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights/
Centre for Human Rights*

United Nations Population Fund

*Briefing Note
and
Final Recommendations*

*Roundtable of Human Rights Treaty Bodies on
“Human Rights Approaches to Women’s Health,
with a focus on Reproductive and Sexual Health and Rights”,
Harrison Conference Center
Glen Cove, Long Island, New York
8-11 December 1996*

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*Briefing Note on
Roundtable of Human Rights Treaty Bodies on
"Human Rights Approaches to Women's Health including Reproductive and Sexual
Health and Rights"
(Glen Cove, Long Island; 9-11 December 1996)*

The Roundtable was an historic meeting. It was the first time that experts from all the United Nations human rights treaty bodies met together to concentrate on the interpretation of guaranteed rights, apart from the annual meeting of the Chairpersons of the United Nations human rights treaty bodies. It was also the first time that experts from all the United Nations human rights treaty bodies, representatives of the United Nations agencies and other bodies, and representatives of NGOs met to discuss a thematic issue.

The meeting was co-organized by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights/UN Centre for Human Rights (UNHCHR/CHR), and the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW). There were approximately 57 participants and 2 observers, comprised of 12 experts from the 6 treaty bodies; representatives from 12 international and national NGOs, including academic institutions; representatives from UN agencies and other bodies, including the Centre for Human Rights, DAW, UNDP, UNICEF, UNIFEM, ILO, UNAIDS, UNESCO, UNFPA and WHO; and 2 individual attorneys. Observers comprised 2 judges of the Supreme Court of Cameroon.

The overall objective of the Roundtable was to discuss women's right to health, including reproductive and sexual health, in relation to the struggle for gender equality and women's empowerment. In this context, the participants examined the interpretation of human rights treaty norms. They discussed the need to develop methodologies and indicators to promote, implement and monitor health-related rights, especially reproductive and sexual rights.

Using four background papers prepared by independent experts as reference points, plenary meeting discussions focused on:

- ▶ bringing a gender perspective to the right to health, including reproductive and sexual health;
- ▶ interpreting the treaty norms with respect to sexual and reproductive health as human rights;
- ▶ analyzing the right to health, including reproductive and sexual health, in the context of the situation of refugee, migrant and displaced women, as well as of indigenous women.

Presentations were made, and discussions followed, on the perspectives of the treaty bodies regarding the human rights approaches to women's health, including reproductive and sexual rights.

Three working groups were formed to analyze issues and rights regarding maternal mortality, adolescent reproductive health, and HIV/AIDS, respectively. All three groups, in

addition, discussed possible modalities to foster incorporation of human rights dimensions into the actual work of the treaty bodies, United Nations agencies and other bodies, and NGOs.

Thirty-two recommendations emanated from the Roundtable discussions. These recommendations are attached herewith. (The report of the Roundtable proceedings is in the process of being finalized.) The overall recommendation of the Glen Cove Roundtable is that treaty bodies, the United Nations agencies and other bodies, and NGOs should continue to explore modalities by which they may strengthen their mutual working relationships so as to foster and promote a gender-integrated human rights perspective in their respective policies and programmes.

Regarding implementation of the Glen Cove recommendations, discussions are taking place between DAW, UNFPA, CHR and other UN agencies and NGOs as to possible activities in this connection. More specifically, a project proposal is being considered for funding which would include advocacy, research and training activities. In addition, the participation of CEDAW experts is foreseen in various phases of UNFPA's programming cycle; i.e., in programme review and strategy development exercises, regional meetings, field staff training on reproductive rights within a human rights framework.

***Recommendations of the
Roundtable of Human Rights Treaty Bodies on the "Human Rights Approaches to
Women's Health with a focus on Reproductive and Sexual Health and Rights"***

1.0 Treaty Bodies

1.1 Treaty bodies are urged to review and consider the discussions held and recommendations made at this meeting. Treaty bodies are also encouraged to examine both the guidelines for the preparation of reports of States Parties and the general criteria for examining reports as well as specific reports in order to more fully integrate issues of women's health, particularly the right to reproductive and sexual health, into their consideration of the respective reports.

1.2 The Chairpersons of the treaty bodies are urged to allocate a particular time, for example, one of the five days set aside for their Annual Meeting, for consideration of particular thematic issues, including the right to reproductive and sexual health, and to invite concerned UN Agencies and NGOs to participate in such thematic discussions.

1.3 Treaty bodies are encouraged to consider the incorporation of gender dimensions, in particular women's health concerns, as appropriate, in the revision of general comments/recommendations and by preparing general comments/recommendations and guidelines which deal with one or more themes; emphasis should be given to the obligation of States Parties to adopt positive measures to ensure rights.

1.4 Treaty bodies are encouraged to take into account the Declarations made at the World Conference on Human Rights, the International Conference on Population and Development and the World Conference on Women, to the extent that they are pertinent to their treaty norms and provide a useful source of indicators and questions for monitoring human rights, including the right to reproductive and sexual health.

1.5 Treaty bodies should develop their working methods to encourage greater cooperation with UN Agencies, other UN bodies and NGOs, including by identifying and charging a member of each treaty body, as appropriate, to liaise with UN Agencies, other UN bodies and NGOs on thematic issues, in particular on women's health issues, including the right to reproductive and sexual health.

1.6 Treaty bodies should notify UN Agencies, other UN bodies and NGOs of their schedule of meetings as soon as possible and also provide them with the reports of States Parties as soon as they are received, to allow UN Agencies and NGOs to analyse and respond to the reports. Dissemination of such information through the Internet should be encouraged.

1.7 Treaty bodies are urged to consider holding their pre-sessional meetings or to engage in consultations well in advance of their meetings in order to identify issues on which they require information to be provided by States Parties, UN Agencies, other UN bodies and NGOs with respect to the reviewing of reports by States Parties.

1.8 The Secretariat should publicise and disseminate through appropriate media, including the Internet, the general comments/ recommendations made by each treaty body. UN Agencies and NGOs should follow up on such recommendations at a national and regional level.

1.9 The Secretariat should publicise and disseminate, through appropriate media, including the Internet, the concluding observations made by treaty bodies in respect of reports of States Parties. UN agencies and NGOs should follow up on such recommendations at a national and regional level.

2.0 UN Agencies and other UN Bodies

2.1 Experts of UN Agencies and other UN bodies are urged to review and consider the discussions held and recommendations made at this meeting. In the meantime, they should examine specific reports by States Parties to treaty bodies in order to provide specific information which would allow for fuller integration of issues of women's health, in particular reproductive and sexual health, in the consideration of the respective reports.

2.2 UN Agencies and other UN bodies should allocate adequate human and other resources to human rights activities and seriously integrate human rights concerns into all their programmatic work and policy-making, including by the development of in-house expertise on human rights, and in so doing should support and be more actively and effectively involved in the work of the treaty bodies.

2.3 UN Agencies and other UN bodies should provide training, both to staff at headquarters and field level and to their government and other counterparts, on the application of human rights to their work, and should call upon the expertise of treaty body members and NGOs, where appropriate.

in relation to treaty bodies:

2.4 UN Agencies should consult with treaty bodies on their information collection systems, identifying the kinds of information which the Agencies could provide to and analyse for the treaty bodies and considering ways to revise the Agencies' processes of information collection and analysis to enhance the capacity of the treaty bodies to monitor human rights.

2.5 UN Agencies should provide technical assistance to treaty bodies in understanding and developing standards and processes for monitoring women's health issues, in particular the right to reproductive and sexual health.

2.6 UN Agencies should assist the treaty bodies, as appropriate, in elaborating the content of the core minimum obligations of States Parties under the respective human rights treaties and the progressive steps which could be taken in realisation of particular treaty provisions, and in developing inquiries for States Parties regarding the inclusion of, for example, relevant quantitative and qualitative information in their reports.

2.7 UN Agencies should identify available information, particularly country-specific information, which would be relevant to consideration of reports of States Parties and, where possible, should provide such information to the treaty bodies.

2.8 UN Agencies and other UN bodies should also co-ordinate efforts to build the capacity of countries to monitor human rights, in particular the right to reproductive and sexual health.

2.9 Recognising the obstacles to direct participation in the examination of reports by States Parties, UN Agencies could analyse each treaty and the work of each treaty body and, where possible, assist the treaty bodies in identifying gaps between the contents of the reports of States Parties and specific country situations.

2.11 UN Agencies should receive and follow up as pertinent the concluding comments and suggestions of the treaty bodies on reports by States Parties and work with countries to implement such recommendations.

in relation to NGOs:

2.12 While respecting the autonomy of NGOs, UN agencies should facilitate and support the work of NGOs, particularly those monitoring the implementation of the Declarations of the UN World Conference on Human Rights, the International Conference on Population and Development and the Fourth World Conference on Women, in obtaining and providing training, information and resources to understand and use human rights in their work on the ground, becoming more involved in the human rights treaty monitoring process and increasing their capacity to use information regarding the treaty monitoring process to protect human rights.

3.0 NGOS

3.1 The NGO experts participating in this meeting are urged to communicate the discussions and recommendations of this meeting to their constituencies and to other NGOs. In the meantime, they should be aware of the criteria for reporting by States Parties as well as the content of specific reports in order to more fully contribute to the integration of issues of women's health, particularly reproductive and sexual health, into the consideration of the respective reports.

3.2 NGOs are vital to the human rights system because they provide credible and reliable independent information (such as shadow reports), and they can contribute to making UN Agencies aware of the human rights dimensions of their work. It is very important that NGOs be able to participate in treaty monitoring and conference implementation processes, and that their autonomy in doing so is respected.

3.3 NGOs are a source of valuable information which can assist the treaty bodies in developing comments, recommendations and guidelines for reporting including by identifying meaningful quantitative as well as qualitative criteria and sources of information.

3.4 NGOs might identify the human rights dimensions of health issues, with a particular focus on women's reproductive and sexual health, and bring these to the attention of the treaty bodies.

3.5 NGOs might consider identifying a national focal point for liaison with UN Agencies regarding the treaty monitoring process.

3.6 UN Agencies might provide NGOS with resources, including financial support, for programmes on human rights education, and legal literacy at grassroots levels, as well as for training on the treaty monitoring process and ensure on a local level that they have knowledge of treaty monitoring activities.

3.7 Donor assistance should be provided to NGOs to assist in their involvement in the treaty monitoring process as well as in the implementation of the conference documents.

4.0 Treaty Bodies, UN Agencies and NGOs

4.1 Further dialogues between treaty bodies, UN Agencies and NGOs might be held on thematic issues relating to human rights, both internationally, regionally and nationally. Members of treaty bodies should be identified and invited to participate in such dialogues.

4.2 Dialogues between UN Agencies, the treaty bodies and NGOs might be held to identify gaps in information collection and to explore different ways of collecting and sharing information which would be useful for identifying indicators for monitoring of human rights.

4.3 UN Agencies and NGOs might assist the treaty bodies in identifying criteria which establish the core minimum obligations of states to comply with the human rights treaties, and in developing guidelines regarding the inquiries to be made of states parties during the reporting process, as well as in developing recommendations and general comments relating to the progressive steps to be taken by states in ensuring compliance with the treaty norms.

4.4 UN Agencies might collaborate with NGOs regarding the establishing of national advocacy bodies to promote human rights, and also to assist the treaty bodies in monitoring human rights, while respecting the autonomy of the NGOs and recognising their different role.

4.5 Treaty bodies, UN Agencies and NGOs might invite experts in gender and women's human rights to assist them in understanding and integrating gender concerns in the interpretation and implementation of their mandates.