



Women Enabled International

account**ABILITY** toolkit

U.N. Special Procedures Fact Sheet



Overview

Special Procedures are independent human rights experts appointed by the U.N. Human Rights Council to monitor human rights situations either in a specific country or worldwide around a specific human rights issue.

For example: The U.N. Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities raises awareness about the rights of people with disabilities and helps States better understand how to respect, protect, and fulfill these rights.

Special Procedures can either be individuals (called either **Special Rapporteurs** or **Independent Experts**) or groups of five experts with each expert representing one of the five U.N. regional groupings (called **Working Groups**).

Special Procedures examine, monitor, advise and publicly report on human rights situations in specific countries and/or help to clarify and develop international human rights standards around major human rights issues worldwide.

They have three primary methods of work:

- **country visits,**
- **thematic reports,** and
- **urgent communications.**

Civil society plays an important role in informing the work of Special Procedures and to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how human rights standards can be implemented to respect, protect, and fulfill the rights of women and girls with disabilities. Advocacy with Special Procedures can:

- improve the guidance and recommendations for States to implement their human rights obligations;
- engage local and national government officials in dialogue about these obligations; and
- bring attention to urgent human rights issues, including those impacting women and girls with disabilities.

Country Visits

Special Rapporteurs and Working Groups can conduct country visits to assess the human rights situation in a given country provided they can obtain an invitation from that country. Special Rapporteurs and Working Groups can request to undertake a country visit in any country that is a U.N. Member State; no treaty ratification is required.

Civil society can support country visits by Special Procedures in several ways. Civil society can:

- Encourage a mandate holder to conduct a country visit to their country;
- Advocate with their government to issue an invitation or accept a request for a visit;
- Provide general information about the human rights situation in the country, including background information on relevant laws and policies of the country;
- Make suggestions on places to visit or individuals or organizations with whom to speak; and/or
- Provide logistical support for a country visit.

At the conclusion of their visits, Special Procedures issue specific findings and specific recommendations to States to improve the human rights situation on the ground. Civil society can then use the findings and recommendations in country visit reports to advocate with their governments.

More information, including information about forthcoming country visits by Special Procedures, can be found here: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/SP/Pages/CountryandothervisitsSP.aspx>

Excerpt from the Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities on her visit to Zambia, U.N. Doc. A/HRC/34/58/Add.2 (2016)

B. Recommendations

80. The Special Rapporteur recommends that the Government of Zambia: (a) Strengthen the institutional data collection and analysis capacity of the Zambia Agency for Persons with Disabilities and the Central Statistical Office and ensure that all data collected relating to the situation of persons with disabilities are disaggregated, at a minimum, by sex and age;
81. The Special Rapporteur recommends that the Government of Zambia: (a) Ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the optional protocols to other international human rights instruments to which Zambia is party;

Thematic Reports

Special Procedures also develop annual thematic reports on important human rights issues, which they present to the U.N. Human Rights Council. Most Special Procedures also present a second annual report to the U.N. General Assembly. These reports:

- Examine important issues within the scope of their mandate, including emerging or cross-cutting issues;
- Provide an in-depth analysis of international human rights law as it applies to the specific issue; and
- Provide clarity and guidance to States on their obligations under international human rights law.

For example: Rashida Manjoo, the former Special Rapporteur on violence against women, issued a thematic report on violence against women with disabilities, extensively documenting the various forms of violence experienced by women and girls with disabilities and the causes and consequences of such violence, while providing recommendations for measures States should take to address such violence.

While not legally binding, thematic reports are valuable for understanding the obligations States have under international human rights law.

Thematic reports are a useful resource for civil society in both domestic and international advocacy efforts. By contributing to the development of thematic reports, civil society can ensure that the reports raise issues of concern to women and girls with disabilities, even for thematic reports that are not specifically about women and girls with disabilities.

For example: Dainius Puras, the former Special Rapporteur on the right to health, prepared a thematic report on adolescent health. Women Enabled International provided a written submission about the sexual and reproductive health and rights of adolescents with disabilities, with a particular focus on girls with disabilities. The final report devoted a paragraph to addressing the specific barriers that adolescents with disabilities face in realizing their sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Civil society can play an important role in supporting the development of these reports by:

- Suggesting or encouraging Special Procedure mandate holders to take up a thematic issue.
- Providing information, frequently in response to a call for submissions or questionnaire from the Special Procedure, to inform the development of a thematic report. This can include country-specific information to illustrate certain types of human rights abuses, legal analysis about the scope of applicable human rights obligations, and/or good practices for realizing the rights of women and girls with disabilities.
- Participate in regional or global consultations with Special Procedures, as opportunities arise.

Urgent Communications

Urgent communications allow Special Procedures to contact States about specific alleged human rights violations. Special Procedures can contact States directly when they receive concrete, credible information of:

- human rights violations that have occurred,
- human rights violations are ongoing or are highly likely to occur, or
- bills, legislation, policies or practices that violate international human rights standards.

Civil society can request an urgent communication by submitting well-substantiated and specific information to Special Procedures about past human rights violations, potential or ongoing violations, or laws, policies or programs violating human rights.

Urgent communications are most effective when they are well-timed, such that an intervention from an international expert can influence the response to an urgent human rights situation. It is important to note, however, that Special Procedures may not pursue all requests for urgent communications.

The Special Procedures branch of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights recently launched an online process to submit urgent communications. To submit communications online and for additional information about this process, visit <https://spsubmission.ohchr.org/>.

Example of an Urgent Communication: Institutionalization of and Violence against People with Disabilities in Hungary

In August 2017, advocates filed an urgent communication alleging that Hungary segregated people with disabilities in closed institutions and denied them needed support to live independent lives in the community. The communication further alleged high rates of violence and cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment in these institutions. The communication was filed on behalf of at least 220 unidentified victims living in such institutions.

A number of Special Procedures—including the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women—took up this urgent communication, requesting specific information from the Hungarian government about institutionalization, cases of violence against people with disabilities in such institutions, and what steps the State was taking to ensure access to justice in such cases.

The Hungarian government, in response, had to assess what steps it was taking to address institutionalization and to ensure, for instance, that perpetrators of violence in institutions was being prosecuted and appropriately sanctioned. Hungary's reply to the Special Procedures communication can be found in full here: <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadFile?gId=69226>.

Examples of Key Thematic Special Procedures and Contact Information

Independent Expert on the enjoyment of human rights by persons with albinism

www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Albinism/Pages/IEAlbinism.aspx

Email: albinism@ohchr.org

Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities

www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Disability/SRDisabilities/Pages/SRDisabilitiesIndex.aspx

Email: sr.disability@ohchr.org

Special Rapporteur on the right to education

www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Education/SREducation/Pages/SREducationIndex.aspx

Email: sreducation@ohchr.org

Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health

www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Health/Pages/SRRightHealthIndex.aspx

Email: srhealth@ohchr.org

Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, and the right to non-discrimination in this context

www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Housing/Pages/HousingIndex.aspx

Email: srhousing@ohchr.org

Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights

www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Poverty/Pages/SRExtremePovertyIndex.aspx

Email: srextremepoverty@ohchr.org

Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment

www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Torture/SRTorture/Pages/SRTortureIndex.aspx

Email: sr-torture@ohchr.org

Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences

www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Women/SRWomen/Pages/SRWomenIndex.aspx

Email: vaw@ohchr.org

Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples

www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/IPeoples/SRIndigenousPeoples/Pages/SRIPeoplesIndex.aspx

Email: indigenous@ohchr.org

Working Group on discrimination against women in law and practice

www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Women/WGWomen/Pages/WGWomenIndex.aspx

Email: wgdiscriminationwomen@ohchr.org



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