

**Guidelines for Accreditation & Re-Accreditation of National Human Rights Institutions to the
International Coordinating Committee of National Human Rights Institutions
Version 4 – June 2009**

1. Background

The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has emphasised that National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) around the globe are essential partners in protecting and promoting human rights at the national and regional levels. In order to preserve this international recognition and trust, NHRIs must continue to be credible, legitimate, relevant and effective. This can be achieved by ensuring that the Paris Principles, the principal source of normative standards for NHRIs, guide the work of NHRIs. OHCHR and the International Coordinating Committee of NHRIs (ICC) work closely to ensure that NHRIs are established and strengthened in line with the Paris Principles.

The ICC is an international association of NHRIs which promotes and strengthens NHRIs to be in accordance with the Paris Principles and provides leadership in the promotion and protection of human rights (ICC Statute, Art 5)¹. NHRIs may become a voting member of the ICC when they are assessed in compliance with the Paris Principles².

Reviewing NHRIs' compliance with the Paris Principles, through its accreditation and reaccreditation process (i.e. through the work of its Sub-committee on Accreditation), is one of the main functions of the ICC. In accordance with the Statute of the ICC, the Sub-Committee on Accreditation (the Sub-committee) has the mandate to consider and review applications for accreditation, re-accreditation and accreditation reviews of NHRIs on the basis of written evidence submitted (including special reviews)³. The ICC Bureau is vested with the power to decide applications for accreditation after considering the recommendation from the Sub-Committee on Accreditation (ICC Statute, Art 46).

The accreditation process has progressively become more rigorous and transparent, and now considers the effectiveness of NHRIs and their engagement with the international human rights system. The Sub-Committee assesses a NHRI's compliance with the Paris Principles in law and in practice. All applications for accreditation under the Paris Principles are decided under the auspices of, and in cooperation with, OHCHR.

The following sections explain what the accreditation process is and how it works, and includes recent developments as approved by the ICC.

2. How to make an application

New applicants seeking accreditation under the Paris Principles should apply to the Chairperson of the ICC, through the National Institutions Unit of the OHCHR, in its capacity as ICC Secretariat (ICC Statute, Art 10). NHRIs due to be reviewed under the established re-accreditation process will be contacted by OHCHR in due time indicating a deadline for submission of a complete application for re-accreditation.

In accordance with Art 10 of the ICC Statute, applications for accreditation or reaccreditation must supply the following supporting documents:

- a copy of the legislation or other instrument by which it is established and empowered in its official or published format (e.g. statute, and/or constitutional provision, and/or presidential decree);
- an outline of its organizational structure including details of staff and annual budget;
- a copy of its most recent annual report or equivalent document in its official or published format;

¹ Adopted on 30 July 2008, as amended on 21 October 2008, and further amended on 24 March 2009.

² Benefits of membership (i.e. full compliance with the Paris Principles, 'A status' accreditation) for NHRIs are a recognised standing in the international community (e.g. right to seat and speak in the Human Rights Council); a strengthened voice of NHRIs internationally; possibility to play an active role in ICC decision making and policy development; access to ICC services (e.g. fora to exchange good practices, develop knowledge, share expertise and network); access to cooperation on issues of common concern.

³ ICC Statute, Art 1.1 defines the Sub-committee on Accreditation as 'the sub-committee established under the former Rules of Procedure and referred to as the Accreditation Subcommittee of the ICC in Human Rights Council resolution 2005/74 as the authority to accredit NHRIs, under the auspices of the OHCHR, and whose mandate is given to it under and in accordance with the Rules of Procedure for the ICC Sub-Committee on Accreditation'...

- a detailed statement showing how it complies with the Paris Principles as well as any respects in which it does not so comply and any proposals to ensure compliance (following the template provided by OHCHR).

Where possible, applicants should provide documentation in its official or published form (for example, published laws and published annual reports) and not secondary analytical documents. For documents that are translated by the applicant NHRI for the Sub-Committee, the NHRI is requested to include the official letterhead of the institution with its logo on the translated document.

All the above mentioned documents must be received by OHCHR (in its capacity as the ICC Secretariat) four (4) months before the following Sub-Committee on Accreditation session⁴. NHRIs can submit information in one of the working languages of the ICC – English, French or Spanish but shall not be translated by the Secretariat⁵.

Documentation should be submitted in both hard copy and electronic format to the ICC Secretariat at OHCHR at the following address: National Institutions Unit, OHCHR, CH-1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland, and by email to the National Institutions Unit (gmagazzeni@ohchr.org; falbanese@ohchr.org; emonsalve@ohchr.org).

3. Deadlines for submission of an application

Deadlines for complete submission of documents must be absolutely adhered to. The Sub-committee is very strict on supporting the Secretariat in this regard. At its 18th Session in 2006, the ICC agreed that late submission will not be considered until a subsequent meeting of the Sub-Committee. For NHRIs seeking re-accreditation, such a delay may result in a suspension of the NHRI's accreditation status⁶. At its 20th session in 2008 the ICC agreed that the deadline for the Secretariat to receive a complete application for each applicant NHRI is four (4) months before the scheduled Sub-committee session.

4. The application process

a) Before the Sub-Committee meeting

In addition to an initial application, the Sub-Committee may review an NHRI's compliance with the Paris Principles in the following circumstances. First, under Art 15 of the ICC Statute, NHRIs that hold an "A" Status are periodically reviewed every 5 years. Additionally, following the March 2009 session of the Sub-Committee on Accreditation, the ICC Bureau agreed that NHRIs holding "B" Status would also be subject to the 5-year review process.⁷ Finally, under Art 16.2 of the ICC Statute, the Chair of the ICC or a member of the Sub-Committee on Accreditation may initiate an accreditation review of a particular NHRI when he/she perceives a change in the circumstances of any "A Status" NHRI which may affect its compliance with the Paris Principles.⁸

As noted above in section 2, applications and supporting documents are received and processed by the National Institutions Unit of the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in its capacity as the ICC Secretariat.

Civil society organizations may also provide relevant information to OHCHR pertaining to any accreditation matter before the Sub-Committee. According to Rule 3.6 of the Sub-Committee's Rules of Procedure, those wishing to do so must provide such information in writing to OHCHR at least four (4) months prior to the meeting of the Sub-Committee.

OHCHR shares the complete file of the applicant NHRI with the four Sub-Committee members. It also reviews the supporting documentation provided and prepares a summary, which follows the structure of the statement of compliance provided by the NHRI. The summary is also shared with relevant OHCHR desk officers and United Nations field presences. During this process, OHCHR may contact the applicant NHRI to

⁴ Sub-Committee on Accreditation Rules of Procedure, Rule 3.4

⁵ According to the Statute of the ICC (article 42), the working languages of the ICC are English, French and Spanish.

⁶ Sub-Committee on Accreditation Rules of Procedure, Rule 3.5

⁷ See, Report and Recommendations of the Session of the Sub-Committee on Accreditation (Geneva, 26-30 March 2009), at paragraph 2.6

⁸ Under Art 16.1 NHRIs are obliged to inform the Chairperson of any changes that may affect its compliance with the Paris Principles

seek further information or clarification on issues arising. The summary is shared with the applicant NHRI to check for factual errors, one week prior to its distribution to the Sub-Committee members.

b) During the Sub-Committee meeting

The procedures adopted by the Sub-committee aim to facilitate dialogue and exchange of information between it and the applicant NHRI as deemed necessary to come to a fair and just decision. The summary and the statement of compliance are the basis for the discussions during the Sub-Committee meetings. The complete documentation file received is also available to Sub-Committee members during the meeting. Since November 2008, the Sub-committee has invited regional coordinating committees of NHRIs⁹ to attend its sessions as observers. This has proven very effective to help the Sub-committee have a better understanding of the legal and political contexts in which NHRIs operate. During these deliberations, OHCHR desk officers are also invited to participate and provide their views. The Sub-Committee requests contact persons within applicant NHRIs to be available by phone during the review as it may also call them to request additional information needed to evaluate the NHRI. Applicant NHRIs are not present during the meetings of the Sub-Committee.

In the course of the meeting, the Sub-Committee agrees on a recommended accreditation status for each applicant NHRI. In accordance with Rule 5 of the ICC Sub-Committee on Accreditation Rules of Procedure, the different classifications for accreditation used by the Sub-Committee are:

- A: Voting member – fully in compliance with each of the Paris Principles;
- B: Non-voting member – not fully in compliance with each of the Paris Principles or insufficient information provided to make a determination;
- C: No status – not in compliance with the Paris Principles.

c) After the Sub-Committee meeting

The process for approving the Sub-Committee's recommendations is set out in Art 12 of the ICC Statute. After the evaluation of an NHRI application, OHCHR sends the recommendation of the Sub-Committee first to relevant applicant NHRIs. These NHRIs have 28 days to react to the recommendation, if they so wish. Immediately after that 28-day period, OHCHR sends the Report and Recommendations of the Sub-Committee (and any response from the applicant NHRI) to the 16 members of the ICC Bureau. The Bureau members have twenty (20) days to approve or object to the recommendations.

Any member of the ICC Bureau who disagrees with the recommendation must notify the Chair of the Sub-Committee and the ICC Secretariat within these 20 days. The ICC Secretariat then notifies all other Bureau members and provides all information to clarify that objection. If at least four members of the ICC Bureau (coming from not less than two regional groups) notify the ICC Secretariat that they hold a similar objection within twenty (20) days of receipt of this information, the recommendation shall be referred to the next ICC Bureau meeting for decision. If the required number of members does not raise any objection to the recommendation within the 20 day period, it will be deemed to be approved by the ICC Bureau.

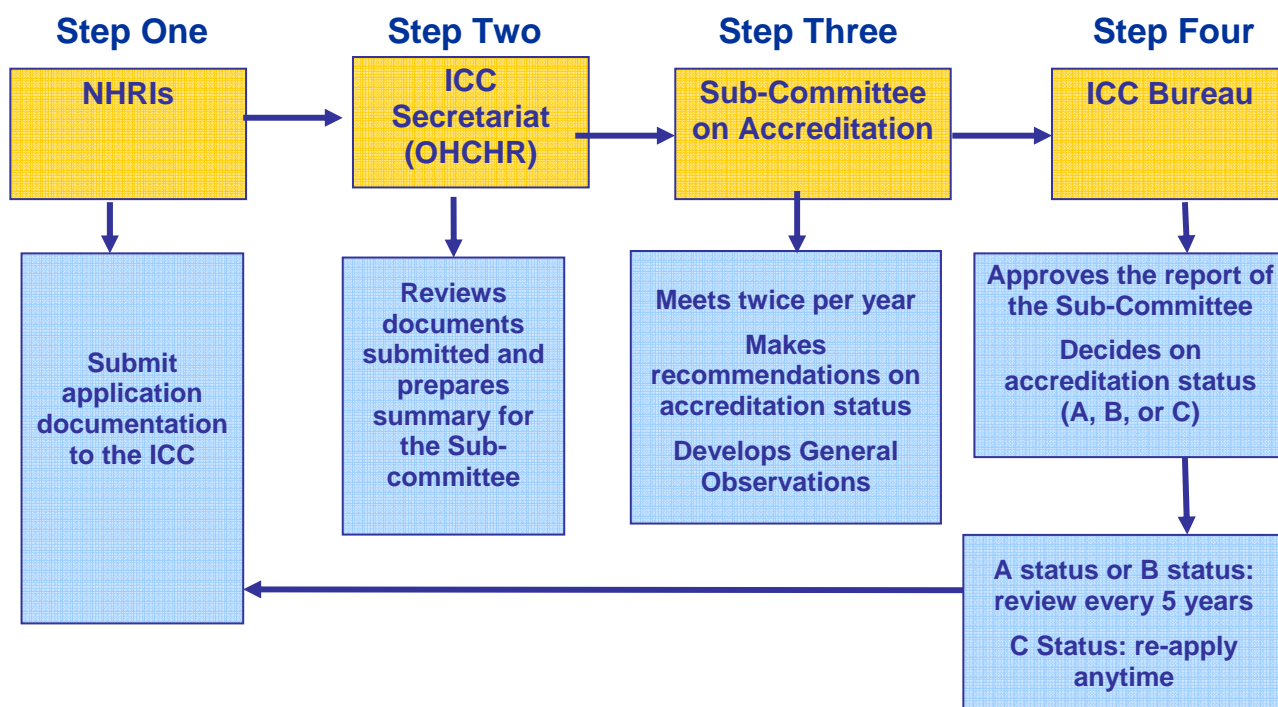
Once the process is complete, the accreditation documentation (e.g. summaries, Sub-committee reports and recommendations) are posted to the NHRIs' website (www.nhri.net).

d) Approval of Recommendations

The decision of the ICC Bureau on accreditation, based on the Sub-Committee's review, is final. Unapproved decisions are referred for consideration at the next ICC meeting.

⁹ The four regional groups of NHRIs are: the Network of Africa NHRIs, the Network of Americas, the Asia Pacific Forum of NHRIs and the European group of NHRIs.

e) Diagram of the accreditation and re-accreditation process



5. General Observations of the ICC Sub-Committee on Accreditation

As per the Sub-Committee's Rules of Procedure, the General Observations, are interpretive tools of the Paris Principles, may be used to:

- a) Instruct institutions when they are developing their own processes and mechanisms, to ensure Paris Principles compliance;
- b) Persuade domestic governments to address or remedy issues relating to an institution's compliance with the standards articulated in the General Observations;
- c) Guide the Sub-Committee on Accreditation in its determination of new accreditation applications, re-accreditation applications or special reviews:
 - i) If an institution falls substantially short of the standards articulated in the General Observations, it would be open for the Sub-Committee to find that it was not Paris Principle compliant.
 - ii) If the Sub-Committee has noted concern about an institution's compliance with any of the General Observations, it may consider what steps, if any, have been taken by an institution to address those concerns in future applications. If the Sub-Committee is not provided with proof of efforts to address the General Observations previously made, or offered a reasonable explanation why no efforts had been made, it would be open to the Sub-Committee to interpret such lack of progress as non-compliance with the Paris Principles".

A compilation of the General Observations adopted by the ICC is attached in annex 1.

Applicant NHRIs are also encouraged to refer to the latest ICC Sub-Committee reports available in www.nhri.net to find that latest General Observations developed by the Sub-Committee and pending adoption by the ICC.

ICC SUB-COMMITTEE ON ACCREDITATION

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

1. Competence and responsibilities

1.1 Establishment of national institutions: An NHRI must be established in a constitutional or legal text. Creation by an instrument of the Executive is not adequate to ensure permanency and independence.

1.2 Human rights mandate: All NHRIs should be mandated with specific functions to both protect and promote human rights, such as those listed in the Paris Principles.

1.3 Encouraging ratification or accession to international human rights instruments: The Sub-Committee interprets that the function of encouraging ratification or accession to international human rights instruments, set out in the Paris Principles, is a key function of a National Institution. The Sub-Committee therefore encourages the entrenchment of this function in the enabling legislation of the National Institution to ensure the best protection of human rights within that country.

1.4 Interaction with the International Human Rights System: The Sub-Committee would like to highlight the importance for NHRIs to engage with the international human rights system, in particular the Human Rights Council and its mechanisms (Special Procedures Mandate Holders) and the United Nations Human Rights Treaty Bodies. This means generally NHRIs making an input to, participating in these human rights mechanisms and following up at the national level to the recommendations resulting from the international human rights system. In addition, NHRIs should also actively engage with the ICC and its Sub-Committee on Accreditation, Bureau as well as regional coordinating bodies of NHRIs.

1.5 Cooperation with other human rights institutions: NHRIs should closely cooperate and share information with statutory institutions established also for the promotion and protection of human rights, for example at the state level or on thematic issues, as well as other organizations, such as NGOs, working in the field of human rights and should demonstrate that this occurs in their application to the ICC Sub-Committee.

1.6 Recommendations by NHRIs

NHRI recommendations contained in annual, special or thematic human rights reports should normally be discussed within a reasonable amount of time, not to exceed six months, by the relevant government ministries as well as the competent parliamentary committees. These discussions should be held especially in order to determine the necessary follow up action, as appropriate in any given situation. NHRIs as part of their mandate to promote and protect human rights should ensure follow up action to recommendations contained in their reports.

2. Composition and guarantees of independence and pluralism

2.1 Ensuring pluralism: The Sub-Committee notes there are diverse models of ensuring the requirement of pluralism set out in the Paris Principles. However, the Sub-Committee emphasizes the importance of National Institutions to maintain consistent relationships with civil society and notes that this will be taken into consideration in the assessment of accreditation applications.

The Sub-Committee observes that there are different ways in which pluralism may be achieved through the composition of the National Institution, for example:

- a) Members of the governing body represent different segments of society as referred to in the Paris Principles;
- b) Pluralism through the appointment procedures of the governing body of the National Institution, for example, where diverse societal groups suggest or recommend candidates;
- c) Pluralism through procedures enabling effective cooperation with diverse societal groups, for example advisory committees, networks, consultations or public forums; or
- d) Pluralism through diverse staff representing the different societal groups within the society.

The Sub-Committee further emphasizes that the principle of pluralism includes ensuring the meaningful participation of women in the National Institution.

2.2 Selection and appointment of the governing body: The Sub-Committee notes the critical importance of the selection and appointment process of the governing body in ensuring the pluralism and independence of the National Institution. In particular, the Sub-Committee emphasizes the following factors:

- a) A transparent process
- b) Broad consultation throughout the selection and appointment process
- c) Advertising vacancies broadly
- d) Maximizing the number of potential candidates from a wide range of societal groups
- e) Selecting members to serve in their own individual capacity rather than on behalf of the organization they represent.

2.3 Government representatives on National Institutions: The Sub-Committee understands that the Paris Principles require that Government representatives on governing or advisory bodies of National Institutions do not have decision making or voting capacity.

2.4 Staffing by secondment:

In order to guarantee the independence of the NHRI, the Sub-Committee notes, as a matter of good practice, the following:

- a) Senior level posts should not be filled with secondees;
- b) The number of seconded should not exceed 25% and never be more than 50% of the total workforce of the NHRI.

2.5 Immunity: It is strongly recommended that provisions be included in national law to protect legal liability for actions undertaken in the official capacity of the NHRI.

2.6 Adequate Funding: Provision of adequate funding by the state should, as a minimum include:

- a) the allocation of funds for adequate accommodation, at least its head office;
- b) salaries and benefits awarded to its staff comparable to public service salaries and conditions;
- c) remuneration of Commissioners (where appropriate); and
- d) the establishment of communications systems including telephone and internet.

Adequate funding should, to a reasonable degree, ensure the gradual and progressive realization of the improvement of the organization's operations and the fulfilment of their mandate.

Funding from external sources, such as from development partners, should not compose the core funding of the NHRI as it is the responsibility of the state to ensure the NHRI's minimum activity budget in order to allow it to operate towards fulfilling its mandate.

Financial systems should be such that the NHRI has complete financial autonomy. This should be a separate budget line over which it has absolute management and control.

2.7 Staff of an NHRI: As a principle, NHRIs should be empowered to appoint their own staff.

2.8 Full-time Members:

Members of the NHRIs should include full-time remunerated members to:

- a) Ensure the independence of the NHRI free from actual or perceived conflict of interests;
- b) Ensure a stable mandate for the members;
- c) Ensure the ongoing and effective fulfilment of the mandate of the NHRI.

2.9 Guarantee of tenure for members of governing bodies

Provisions for the dismissal of members of governing bodies in conformity with the Paris Principles should be included in the enabling laws for NHRIs.

- a) The dismissal or forced resignation of any member may result in a special review of the accreditation status of the NHRI;
- b) Dismissal should be made in strict conformity with all the substantive and procedural requirements as prescribed by law;

- c) Dismissal should not be allowed based on solely the discretion of appointing authorities.

2.10 Administrative regulation

The classification of an NHRI as a public body has important implications for the regulation of its accountability, funding, and reporting arrangements.

In cases where the administration and expenditure of public funds by an NHRI is regulated by the Government, such regulation must not compromise the NHRI's ability to perform its role independently and effectively. For this reason, it is important that the relationship between the Government and the NHRI be clearly defined.

3. Methods of operation

4. Additional principles concerning the status of commissions with quasi-jurisdictional competence

5. Additional issues

5.1 NHRIs during the situation of a coup d'état or a state of emergency: As a principle, the Sub-Committee expects that, in the situation of a coup d'état or a state of emergency, an NHRI will conduct itself with a heightened level of vigilance and independence in the exercise of their mandate.

5.2 Limitation of power of National Institutions due to national security: The Sub-Committee notes that the scope of the mandate of many National Institutions is restricted for national security reasons. While this tendency is not inherently contrary to the Paris Principles, it is noted that consideration must be given to ensuring that such restriction is not unreasonably or arbitrarily applied and is exercised under due process.

5.3 Functioning of an NHRI in a volatile context: The Sub-Committee acknowledges that the context in which an NHRI operates may be so volatile that the NHRI cannot reasonably be expected to be in full conformity with all the provisions of the Paris Principles. When formulating its recommendation on the accreditation status in such cases, the Sub-Committee will give due consideration to factors such as: political instability; conflict or unrest; lack of state infrastructure, including excessive dependency on donor funding; and the NHRI's execution of its mandate in practice.

6. Procedural issues

6.1 Application processes: With the growing interest in establishing National Institutions, and the introduction of the five-yearly re-accreditation process, the volume of applications to be considered by the Sub-Committee has increased dramatically. In the interest of ensuring an efficient and effective accreditation process, the Sub-Committee emphasizes the following requirements:

- a) Deadlines for applications will be strictly enforced;
- b) Where the deadline for a re-accreditation application is not met, the Sub-Committee will recommend that the accreditation status of the National Institution be suspended until the application is considered at the next meeting;
- c) The Sub-Committee will make assessments on the basis of the documentation provided. Incomplete applications may affect the recommendation on the accreditation status of the National Institution;
- d) Applicants should provide documentation in its official or published form (for example, published laws and published annual reports) and not secondary analytical documents;
- e) Documents must be submitted in both hard copy and electronically;
- f) All application related documentation should be sent to the ICC Secretariat at OHCHR at the following address: National Institutions Unit, OHCHR, CH-1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland and by email to: nationalinstitutions@ohchr.org; and
- g) It is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure that correspondence and application materials have been received by the ICC Secretariat.

6.2 Deferral of re-accreditation applications: The Sub-Committee will apply the following policy on the deferral of re-accreditation applications:

- a) In the event that an institution seeks a deferral of consideration of its re-accreditation application, a decision to grant the deferral can be taken only if written justifications for the deferral have been provided and these are, in the view of the ICC Chairperson, compelling and exceptional;

- b) Re-accreditation applications may be deferred for a maximum of one year, after this time the status of the NHRI will lapse; and
- c) For NHRIs whose re-accreditation applications are received after the due date or who have failed to submit their applications, their accreditation status will be suspended. This suspension can be in place for up to one year during which time the NHRI may submit its application for re-accreditation. If the application is not submitted during this time, the accreditation status will lapse.

6.3 NHRIs under review: Pursuant to Article 16 of the ICC Statute¹⁰, the ICC Chair or the Sub-Committee may initiate a review of a NHRI's accreditation status if it appears that the circumstances of that NHRI may have changed in any way which affects its compliance with the Paris Principles. Such a review is triggered by an exceptional set of circumstances considered to be temporary in nature. As a consequence, the regular re-accreditation process will be deferred until the review is completed.

In its consideration of NHRIs under review, the Sub-Committee will apply the following process:

- a. a NHRI can be under review for a maximum of one and a half years only, during which time it may bring information to the Sub-Committee to demonstrate that, in the areas under review, the NHRI is fully compliant with the Paris Principles;
- b. During the period of review, all privileges associated with the existing accreditation status of the NHRI will remain in place;
- c. If at the end of the period of review, the concerns of the Sub-Committee have not been satisfied, then the accreditation status of the NHRI will lapse

6.4 Suspension of Accreditation: The Sub-Committee notes that the status of suspension means that the accreditation status of the Commission is temporarily suspended until information is brought before the Sub-Committee to demonstrate that, in the areas under review, the Commission is fully compliant with the Paris Principles. An NHRI with a suspended A status is not entitled to the benefits of an A status accreditation, including voting in the ICC and participation rights before the Human Rights Council, until the suspension is lifted or the accreditation status of the NHRI is changed.

6.5 Submission of information: Submissions will only be accepted if they are in paper or electronic format. The Statement of Compliance with the Paris Principles is the core component of the application. Original materials should be submitted to support or substantiate assertions made in this Statement so that the assertions can be validated and confirmed by the Sub-Committee. No assertion will be accepted without material to support it.

Further, where an application follows a previous recommendation of the Sub-Committee, the application should directly address the comments made and should not be submitted unless all concerns can be addressed.

6.6 More than one national institution in a State: The Sub-Committee acknowledges and encourages the trend towards a strong national human rights protection system in a State by having one consolidated and comprehensive national human rights institution.

In very exceptional circumstances, should more than one national institution seek accreditation by the ICC, it should be noted that Article 39 of the ICC Statute¹¹ provides that the State shall have one speaking right, one voting right and, if elected, only one ICC Bureau member.

In those circumstances the conditions precedent for consideration of the application by the Sub-Committee are the following:

- 1) Written consent of the State Government (which itself must be a member of the United Nations).
- 2) Written agreement between all concerned national human rights institutions on the rights and duties as an ICC member including the exercise of the one voting and the one speaking right. This agreement shall also include arrangements for participation in the international human rights system, including the Human Rights Council and the Treaty Bodies.

¹⁰ Formerly article 3(g) of the ICC Rules of Procedure

¹¹ Formerly Rule 3 (b) of the ICC Rules of procedure

The Sub-Committee stresses the above requirements are mandatory for the application to be considered.

6.7 NHRI annual report

The Sub-Committee finds it difficult to review the status of an NHRI in the absence of a current annual report, that is, a report dated not earlier than one year before the time it is scheduled to undergo review by the Sub-Committee. The Sub-Committee stresses the importance for an NHRI to prepare and publicize an annual report on its national situation with regard to human rights in general, and on more specific matters. This report should include an account of the activities undertaken by the NHRI to further its mandate during that year and should state its opinions, recommendations and proposals to address any human rights issues of concern.

Adopted by International Coordinating Committee of National Human Rights Institutions for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights (ICC) by email after the SCA meeting of March 2009.

Geneva, June 2009