RE: GQUAL Urges States to Rectify Deficit in Number of Women Nominated and Appointed as members of the Human Rights Committee — The Time is Now to Achieve Gender Balance in Membership, for First Time in 48 Years

Your Excellency,

The GQUAL Campaign urges States Parties to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to rectify the current deficit in the number of women candidates nominated to stand in upcoming elections for nine Human Rights Committee (CCPR) vacancies, and calls for their broader commitment to the achievement of gender parity in the Committee’s composition for the first time in its 48-year history.

At this time, just seven (38.89%) of 18 Committee members are women, and the Committee has never achieved gender parity.¹

During its forthcoming 40th Meeting of State Parties, on 29 May 2024, elections will be held for 9 out of 18 total CCPR members. As such, its outcomes are bound to yield a significant impact on the Committee’s composition, and consequently on its legitimacy and effectiveness. The upcoming election provides Member States with the vital opportunity, and concurrent responsibility, to overcome the historic underrepresentation of women and achieve gender parity in the Committee’s composition for the first time, by nominating and selecting an adequate pool of independent and qualified women candidates.²

However, States Parties have to date submitted 14 nominations, inclusive of 8 men and only 6 women (42.85%).³ Regrettably, this candidate pool not only lacks the diversity needed to achieve gender parity on the Committee, but carries the risk of lowering the current levels of women’s representation on the CCPR, in light of the fact that only 3 of the 9 members not presently up for reelection, are women (33.33%).

The HRC plays a critical role in the universal human rights architecture by overseeing compliance with the ICCPR, which, as a core treaty of the universal system, forms the International Bill of Human Rights together with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. As one of the oldest

---

¹ Available data indicate that the Committee featured an all-male membership from its inception in 1977 to 1984, which saw the appointment of the first woman member. Subsequently, the number of women members grew at an uneven pace, reaching two members in 1987 (11.11%), three in 1993 (16.67%), four in 1995 (22.22%), and five in 1997 (27.78%), before falling to four in 1999 (22.22%), and just two in 2001 (11.11%). Beginning 2005, women’s membership rose gradually, reaching its peak in 2017, with 8 women out of 18 members, or 44.44%. Unfortunately, this ratio was not sustained in subsequent cycles, once again falling to six (33.33%) and five (27.78%) women in 2019 and 2020 respectively. See OHCHR, Gender composition of the Treaty Bodies as of January 2023, https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/treaty-bodies/elections/2023-01-31/Gender-composition-Treaty-Bodies-012023.pdf.


monitoring bodies in the universal system, the CCPR monitors and promotes the implementation of a broad scope of fundamental human rights—including those to equality between men and women and to protection against discrimination on the grounds of gender, which extend to women’s rights to equal participation in international decision-making.

Women’s equal and meaningful participation in the CCPR’s membership is imperative both to amplifying and enhancing the depth and impact of its decisions, and to guaranteeing its legitimacy and cogency across its functions. As concluded by the Human Rights Council’s Advisory Committee in its report on gender balance in UN human right bodies presented to the CCPR on 21 May, 2021, the lack of gender balance in international justice mechanisms not only affects women’s right to equality, but erodes their very credibility and effectiveness. It limits the range of issues, perspectives, and solutions that should be indispensable to their undertakings and outputs.

Along with the specific criteria of high moral character, recognized competence in the field of human rights, and consideration to the usefulness of legal experience⁴, and independence, and impartiality⁵, States have affirmed – including through General Assembly Resolution 68/268 (2014), on Strengthening and enhancing the effective functioning of the human rights treaty body system – the importance of considering gender balance when appointing members to Treaty Bodies. This has also been consistently underlined by the Secretary General in reports and Resolutions on the status of the human rights treaty body system⁶, issued as part of the treaty body strengthening process, and by the current High Commissioner for Human Rights.⁷

Consequently, we urge Member States to take steps to identify and nominate additional women candidates for the upcoming elections and to consider the importance of improving gender balance in the CCPR in the context of the upcoming elections. As recommended by the Advisory Committee to address such situations, an extension of the deadline period for nominations could be granted to allow for additional women candidates to be nominated.

In conclusion, we recall the recommendations of the Advisory Committee, in its 2021 report on “Current levels of representation of women in human rights organs and mechanisms: ensuring gender balance” (A/HRC/47/51), for States Parties to take, among others, the following measures:

1) **Ensure more female candidates are identified and nominated by:**

---


b. Disseminating information regarding vacancies, being proactive to ensure that such information reaches qualified women.

c. Developing and adopting formal, open, and transparent national nomination procedures.

d. Including gender parity as a specific selection criterion and goal in formal nomination procedures.

e. Considering the actual and historical gender composition of the respective UN body and committing to nominate an [independent and qualified expert] candidate of the underrepresented gender.

2) Ensure that more women are elected or appointed by:

a. Undertaking firm commitments to guarantee gender parity in the election of candidates to fill vacancies in United Nations human rights bodies and mechanisms.

b. Incorporating gender parity into voting practices.

c. Adopting policies that require the nomination of men and women, as well as considering the actual and historic composition of organs to be considered when voting, especially in relation to bodies that have not achieved gender parity.

d. Implementing target measures, such as encouraging States to commit to electing [independent and qualified] members only of the gender that is underrepresented in that body.

e. Voting for female candidates in consecutive voting rounds if the minimum targets for parity are not achieved in the first round of votes.

We strongly call upon States Parties to uphold the fundamental principles of the ICCPR in the context of the CCPR’s upcoming elections, and to consider the Advisory Committee’s recommendation, as well as any other measures aimed at ensuring that the Committee’s next composition achieves the historic milestone of gender equality in its membership.

We thank you for your attention and remain at your disposal for engaging in this important conversation at your Excellencies’ convenience.

Sincerely,

The GQUAL Secretariat:

Viviana Krsticevic

Maria Noel Leoni

Claudia Martin

Alejandra Vicente