

Who monitors adherence to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women?

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) is the body of independent experts that monitors implementation of the Convention.

CEDAW meets three times a year (February, June and October) and consists of 23 experts on women's rights from around the world.

When do governments report to CEDAW?

As part of signing-up to the Convention, state parties (e.g. the UK government) are obliged to regularly report to CEDAW. Usually this should happen every four years.

The last time the UK government were examined by CEDAW was in 2008. The next UK session is scheduled for 2012 (but this is subject to change and sometimes government's combine sessions meaning that they report every 8 years for example).

What is the process of reporting to CEDAW?

Government develops its report. This report describes what the government has done and its future plans for each of the articles, and should also address the Concluding Observations from the previous session with CEDAW.

Many governments hold consultations with NGOs in the development of its report.



Government submits its written report to CEDAW, usually at least 6 months in advance of reporting to CEDAW in person. The report, and also any other correspondence to CEDAW including NGO shadow reports, is published on the website of the Office for the United Nations Commissioner for Human Rights.

For example, the 2008 reports and correspondence related to the UK can be seen here:

- <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cedaw/cedaws41.htm>



Six months before a country is due to give its oral report (i.e. in person) to CEDAW, a pre-sessional working group of CEDAW experts will examine the country's report and ask for more information if the report is not comprehensive enough. The country is then obliged to provide written answers.



NGOs that have worked with the government to prepare the official report may find that the government report as submitted may not include their concerns. CEDAW recognises that even where the NGOs have been consulted in preparation of the official report, the final version may omit their point of view. Therefore, it is important for NGOs to submit their own reports (called 'alternative', 'independent' or 'shadow' reports) to complete the record.

NGOs wanting to submit shadow or alternative reports to CEDAW should do so at least 3-4 months in advance of the country reporting in person - the sooner the better.

Ideally, a shadow report should follow the same format as the Government's report – identifying any inaccuracies, gaps in information given to CEDAW etc.



In the immediate days leading up to CEDAW's examination of a government in person, NGOs have the opportunity to lobby CEDAW members. This can include meetings, events and written briefings.



The government delegation reports to CEDAW in person over the course of a day. CEDAW asks questions of the Government representatives.



CEDAW considers the Government's and NGOs' information (both written and oral).

About a month after the oral report, CEDAW publishes its Concluding Observations.

For example, CEDAW's 2008 Concluding Observations to the UK government can be seen here:

- <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N09/555/92/PDF/N0955592.pdf?OpenElement>

What is the difference between a shadow report and an alternative report?

When an NGO writes its report with access to the government report submitted to CEDAW, this is called a shadow report.

When an NGO writes its report where no government report is available (e.g. either because their government has not written one or it writes it too late), this is called an alternative report.

Who can submit a shadow or alternative report?

Any NGO can submit a shadow or alternative report.

However, reading through a large number of reports greatly increases the workload of CEDAW and the Committee has asked that **NGOs work together** to minimise the number of NGO reports.

For example, in 2008, 12 NGO shadow or alternative reports were submitted. Ideally, this should be reduced to 1-3 NGO reports although this can be difficult for countries like the UK where laws, policies etc. vary between each of the 4 countries.

A number of NGOs will be producing shadow reports for the UK's next CEDAW session and we strongly advise joining with other women's NGOs to produce a report rather than submitting individual reports.

When should NGOs submit their shadow report?

It is essential that NGOs have read the Government report so they can respond to issues raised (as well as include issues omitted etc.) in their shadow or alternative report. At the very minimum, NGO reports should reach CEDAW at least 3 months before the government is due to report in person. If you can get it in sooner, this is better.

What is the format of a shadow report?

There are no strict rules on shadow reports but NGOs will want to consider the following:

- Read the Government report. It is helpful to CEDAW if you can follow the same format
- Structure your report in a methodical way by convention Article

- You don't have to comment on all the Articles – comment on those where you have expertise. You may want to write a thematic report that concentrates on a specific issue or Article, such as has been produced on violence against women
- Your report should be no more than 30 pages
- Avoid jargon where you can and explain acronyms
- Your report should be based on evidence – statistics, case studies, research etc.
- Make recommendations about how things could be improved and suggestions about questions you would like CEDAW to ask the Government
- Include references
- Good lay-out makes it easier to read your report – think about font size, type face, spacing, graphs, bullet points etc.
- Proof-read your report
- Your report should be pithy and concise – no waffling
- If there are things that the Government have done well, mention these
- Always include an executive summary and contents page
- Link up with others who are submitting a shadow report – you may be able to work together to produce a report or input in to their report instead of writing your own individual report.

How do you submit a shadow report to CEDAW?

You should send (email) your report to International Women's Rights Action Watch (IWRAP) Asia Pacific (<http://www.iwraw-ap.org>).

What else can NGOs do?

- Link up with other NGOs working on the Convention through the WRC Women's Café CEDAW Group <http://thewomenscafe.ning.com/> (you must join the Women's Café to be part of this group which is women-only)
- Attend other NGOs' consultations on their shadow reports
- Stay in touch with the CEDAW Working Group. Contact Charlotte Gage, WRC Policy Officer, on charlotte@wrc.org.uk or 020 7324 3042
- Familiarise yourself with CEDAW's Concluding Observations so you can use them in lobbying government
http://www.wrc.org.uk/resources/help_for_your_organisation/working_internationally/use_cedaws_recommendations_to_lobby_for_your_organisation.aspx

- When engaging with government, reiterate Convention language such as 'substantive equality', 'temporary special measures' etc. so that these concepts become mainstreamed amongst decision-makers.

Useful resources

IWRAW Asia Pacific provide excellent resources for NGOs on CEDAW, the Convention and how NGOs can participate:

- http://www.iwraw-ap.org/using_cedaw/sreport_guidelines.htm

Examples of UK NGO shadow reports (2008):

- <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cedaw/cedaws41.htm>

WRC website pages on CEDAW:

- <http://www.wrc.org.uk/cedaw>