



human
rights

law
resource
centre



Human Rights Law Resource Centre Ltd
Level 1, 550 Lonsdale Street
Melbourne VIC 3000
DX 38227 Flagstaff
P: + 61 3 9225 6695
F: + 61 3 9225 6686
hrirc@vicbar.com.au
www.hrlrc.org.au
ABN: 31 117 719 267

12 September 2007

Mary Polis
Team Leader, Policy & Research
Victorian Law Reform Commission

By email: Mary.Polis@lawreform.vic.gov.au

Dear Mary

**Comments on Summary of Draft Civil Justice Reform Proposals
as at 6 September 2007**

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Victorian Law Reform Commission's Summary of Draft Civil Justice Reform Proposals as at 6 September 2007 ('Second Exposure Draft').

The Human Rights Law Resource Centre welcomes and supports many of the recommendations in the Second Exposure Draft, including particularly in relation to self-represented litigants, interpreters and costs.

General Comments on the Right to a Fair Hearing

We do consider, however, that a range of further proposals are necessary if civil justice procedure in Victoria is to be compatible with the right to a fair hearing enshrined in s 24 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (Vic), including particularly in the areas of

- (a) access to legal advice and legal aid;
- (b) costs and disbursements in pro bono, human rights and public interest matters; and
- (c) third party interveners.

As discussed in our submissions of December 2006 and August 2007, the right to a fair hearing under s 24 of the Charter is modeled on art 14(1) of the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*. The right to a fair hearing is also enshrined, in similar terms, in art 6(1) of the *European Convention on Human Rights* which is given domestic effect in the United Kingdom under the *Human Rights Act*

1998. Under each of these instruments, judicial bodies have consistently stated that human rights must be interpreted and applied in a manner which renders them 'practical and effective, not theoretical and illusory'.¹ Accordingly, the right to a fair hearing has been consistently held, at the very least, to include the minimum basic elements of:

- (a) equal access to, and equality before, the courts;
- (b) the right to legal advice and representation;
- (c) the right to procedural fairness;
- (d) the right to an expeditious trial or hearing without undue delay;
- (e) the right to a competent, independent and impartial tribunal established by law;
- (f) the right to a public hearing; and
- (g) the right to have the free assistance of an interpreter where necessary.

In respect of access to a court, both the Human Rights Committee and the European Court of Human Rights have held that the fair conduct of a civil proceeding is meaningless if one does not have the right to bring the proceeding in the first place. The right to a fair hearing presupposes the right of access to the courts just as it presupposes the existence of the courts themselves.² Both bodies have further held that fulfilment of the right to a fair hearing may require positive action by the state to ensure effective access to the courts, such as waiver of court fees and the provision of legal aid and interpreters.³

Recent Jurisprudential Developments regarding the Right to a Fair Hearing

On 23 August 2007, the UN Human Rights Committee adopted General Comment No 32 on the right to a fair trial and equality before courts and tribunals pursuant to art 14 of the *ICCPR*.⁴ General Comment No 32 will be an important source of guidance on the interpretation and application of s 24 of the Victorian *Charter of Human Rights*.⁵ The Human Rights Law Resource Centre strongly considers that any proposals for civil justice reform in Victoria should, at the least, be compatible with the core minimum elements of a fair hearing set out in General Comment No 32.

A General Comment is an authoritative summary of the views of a human rights treaty body on the normative content and application of the treaty over which it has jurisdiction. It is an accepted principle of domestic law that it is appropriate to consider the opinions and decisions of treaty bodies⁶ and, accordingly, the judicial authority of the Human Rights Committee and its General Comments has been recognised by domestic courts⁷ and in the Explanatory Memorandum to the Victorian *Charter*.

¹ See, eg, *Goodwin v United Kingdom* (2002) 35 EHRR 447, [73]-[74]; *Airey v Ireland* (1979) 2 EHRR 305, 314; *Currie v Jamaica*, UN Doc CCPR/C/50/D/377/1989).

² See, eg, *Golder v United Kingdom*, 4451/70 [1975] ECHR 1.

³ See, eg, *Airey v Ireland* (1979) 2 EHRR 305.

⁴ Human Rights Committee, *General Comment No 32: Art 14: Right to Equality before Courts and Tribunals and a Fair Trial*, UN Doc CCPR/C/GC/32.

⁵ This is particularly so given the statement in the Explanatory Memorandum that s 24 is 'modeled on art 14(1)' of the *ICCPR* and the direction in s 32(2) of the *Charter* to consider international law and the judgment of international courts and tribunals relevant to a human right.

⁶ See, eg, *Commonwealth v Bradley* (1999) 95 FCR 218; *Commonwealth v Hamilton* (2000) 108 FCR 378.

⁷ See, eg, *Cornwell v The Queen* [2007] HCA 12; *Tavita v Minister of Immigration* [1994] 2 NZLR 257.

This is an aspect of the broader principle that it is desirable, as far as possible, that expressions used in international agreements be construed in a uniform and consistent manner by both municipal courts and international courts and panels.⁸

Key features of General Comment No 32 of relevance and significance to civil justice and procedure in Victoria include the recognition that:

- Access to justice is a human right *sui generis* and a critical element of the promotion, protection and fulfilment of other human rights.⁹
- The right to a fair hearing is a fundamental human right. Any limitations on the right must be strictly necessary and the minimal impairment possible. General limitations on the right to a fair hearing are incompatible with the *ICCPR*.¹⁰
- The right to a fair hearing and equality before courts encompasses and subsumes a right of access to courts and tribunals. Appropriate steps and measures must be taken to facilitate such access so as not to undermine the very essence of the right.¹¹
- The availability of legal assistance often determines whether or not an individual can access and participate in judicial proceedings in a meaningful way. Having regard to this, states are encouraged to provide legal aid for indigent individuals in civil proceedings and, in some cases, may be positively obliged to do so. Legal assistance may be required for an individual to vindicate their human rights, including under the *ICCPR*.¹²
- The imposition of fees on parties to judicial proceedings may *de facto* prevent access to justice contrary to the right to a fair hearing. In particular, courts and the state should consider the implications of a rigid rule to award costs to a winning party.¹³
- The right to equality before courts and tribunals requires equality of arms and that all parties involved in judicial proceedings be provided with the same procedural rights. The right to a fair trial must ensure that litigants have the opportunity to present their case in conditions without substantial disadvantage compared to the other party. This may, for example, require the free assistance of an interpreter where otherwise an indigent party could not participate in proceedings on equal terms.¹⁴
- Expeditionness is an important aspect of the fairness of a hearing. Delays in proceedings that cannot be justified by the complexity of the case or the behaviour of the parties are not compatible with the principle of a fair hearing. States must allocate sufficient budgetary resources to ensure the effective administration of justice.¹⁵
- The notion of a fair trial includes the guarantee of a fair and public hearing. The publicity of hearings ensures the transparency of proceedings and thus provides an important safeguard for

⁸ See, eg, *Rocklea Spinning Mills Pty Ltd v Anti Dumping Authority* (1995) 56 FCR 406; *Povey v Qantas Airways Ltd* (2005) 216 ALR 427.

⁹ [2].

¹⁰ [4]-[6].

¹¹ [9].

¹² [10].

¹³ [11].

¹⁴ [13].

¹⁵ [27].

the interests of the individual and of society at large. While the right to a public hearing is one that belongs to the parties in the litigation, it also belongs to the general public in a democratic society. Limitations on an open and public hearing are only permissible in exceptional circumstances, such as national security, the protection of children, or the privacy of individuals.¹⁶

Finally, General Comment No 32 discusses the relationship of art 14 with other provisions of the *ICCPR*, recognising that the right to a fair hearing 'plays an important role in the implementation of the more substantive guarantees of the Covenant'.¹⁷

A copy of General Comment No 32 is attached to this letter.

Specific Recommendations

To ensure compliance of civil justice and procedure with human rights, particularly the right to a fair hearing contained in the Victorian *Charter*, the Human Rights Law Resource Centre recommends that further proposals be developed with respect to:

- (a) access to legal advice and legal aid;
- (b) costs and disbursements in pro bono, human rights and public interest matters; and
- (c) third party interveners.

Each of these areas is discussed further below.

Access to Legal Advice and Legal Aid

As discussed above, the rights to legal representation, equality before the law and a fair hearing are human rights in and of themselves, and are critical aspects of the promotion, protection, fulfilment and enforcement of other human rights. Recognising this, the availability of advice, assistance and advocacy about human rights must be an integral component of civil justice reform.

It is particularly important that human rights advocacy and legal services be available to marginalised and disadvantaged individuals and groups, many of whose human rights are particularly vulnerable to violation and for whom legal services are often largely inaccessible.

According to the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the availability and accessibility of human rights legal services and the justiciability of human rights are among the 'most important tools' to prevent or seek redress for rights violations. The High Commissioner for Human Rights considers that the following measures should constitute key features of an effective human rights promotion and protection strategy:

- access to human rights legal services and clinics for poor and disadvantaged people;
- human rights information and education campaigns targeting marginalised and disadvantaged communities; and
- training programs for lawyers and judges about the content and use of human rights.

¹⁶ [28]-[29].

¹⁷ [58]-[65].

This is consistent with experience and recommendations in both the UK under the *Human Rights Act 1998* and the ACT under the *Human Rights Act 2004*¹⁸ regarding effective implementation and operationalisation of human rights.

An increase in the availability of legal advice and representation and other reforms guaranteeing the basic elements of the right to a fair hearing would reduce the number of unmeritorious claims brought before the courts and also enhance the protection of the human rights of litigants, thereby ensuring a fair and effective civil justice system in Victoria.

The Centre notes that many, if not all, of the recommendations relating to ensuring greater equality in access to justice in actual fact are likely to have the additional effects of increasing the efficiency of the civil justice system, reducing the costs of litigation and providing a more effective and just system.

The Human Rights Law Resource Centre recommends that proposals be developed to provide increased levels of funding for legal aid, community legal centres and impecunious and disadvantaged litigants, particularly for pre-litigation advice to prospective litigants.

Costs and Disbursements

As discussed above, it is well established that the right to a fair hearing subsumes a right of access to the courts.¹⁹ It is also well established that costs and disbursements associated with litigation impact disproportionately on indigent persons and may be regarded as a restriction on the right of access to a court contrary to the right to a fair hearing.²⁰ Both the UN Human Rights Committee and the European Court of Human Rights have relevantly stated that the right to a fair hearing may require positive action by the state to ensure effective access to the courts, including the waiver of court fees and the abolition of any rigid principle that costs be borne by the unsuccessful party.²¹

The Human Rights Law Resource Centre recommends that proposals be developed to:

- (a) establish a disbursements fund to aid pro bono, human rights and public interest matters (see also Recommendation 12 of the PILCH Submission) and expand the guidelines for the Law Aid scheme (see also Recommendation 13 of the PILCH Submission);
- (b) establish model guidelines for the Victorian Government regarding costs in pro bono, human rights and public interest proceedings (see also Recommendation 14 of the PILCH Submission); and
- (c) amend Order 63 of the *Supreme Court Rules* to incorporate provisions relating to costs in pro bono, human rights and public interest proceedings (see also Recommendation 15 of the PILCH Submission).

¹⁸ See generally, ACT Department of Justice and Community Services, *Human Rights Act 2004: Twelve-Month Review – Report* (2006) at www.jcs.act.gov.au/HumanRightsAct/Publications/twelve_month_review.pdf and UK Department for Constitutional Affairs, *Review of the Implementation of the Human Rights Act* (2006) at http://www.justice.gov.uk/docs/full_review.pdf.

¹⁹ See, eg, *Golder v United Kingdom*, 4451/70 [1975] ECHR 1.

²⁰ See, eg, *Kreuz v Poland* [2001] ECHR Application No 28249/95; *Kijewska v Poland* [2007] ECHR Application No 73002/01.

²¹ See, eg, *Airey v Ireland* (1979) 2 EHRR 305.

Third Party Interveners

The Human Rights Law Resource Centre reiterates its submission entitled *Why are Non-Parties Non-Starters? A Call for Clearer Procedures and Guidelines for Amicus Curiae Applications in Victoria* dated November 2006.

As discussed in that submission, based on the experience in Canada after the introduction of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms 1982* and in the United Kingdom following the introduction of the *Human Rights Act 1998*, the Victorian *Charter* is likely to have a significant impact on civil litigation and will almost certainly lead to third parties seeking an increased role in such litigation.²² In order for the experience and expertise of legal practitioners and public interest organisations to be available to the court, and so that the law might gain the full benefit of the commitments made by the executive arm of government under the *Charter*, effective mechanisms for determining non-party participation in proceedings are important. The participation of third-parties in human rights proceedings under the *Charter* will be particularly important in the context of Maxwell P's recent comments that:

1. The Court will encourage practitioners to develop human rights-based arguments where relevant to a question in the proceeding.
2. Practitioners should be alert to the availability of such arguments, and should not be hesitant to advance them where relevant.
3. Since the development of an Australian jurisprudence drawing on international human rights law is in its early stages, further progress will necessarily involve judges and practitioners working together to develop a common expertise.²³

Where an issue of public interest or human rights is at stake, amici may bring to the Court's attention issues which go beyond the immediate litigation between parties. This could include drawing the Court's attention to relevant values, standards and policy issues, or legal principles arising out of international law and foreign jurisdictions.

Amici curiae may also assist a Court to assess more fully the issues being litigated where one or both of the parties lack the time or resources to explore them adequately.

Allowing amici curiae and interveners in cases which are of particular import or deal with issues of broad public interest improves public perceptions of the Court as engaging in an open, informed and participatory decision making process, and enhances the legitimacy of the Court's decisions.²⁴

²² In Canada, commentators and the Courts have remarked upon the 'highly significant role' played by interveners since the introduction of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms: See George Williams, 'The Amicus Curiae and Intervener in the High Court of Australia: A Comparative Analysis' (2000) 28 *Federal Law Review* 365, 373, quoting Iacobucci J as cited in K Makin, 'Interveners: How Many is Too Many?' *Globe and Mail* (10 March 2000); see also Jason Pierce, 'The Road Less Travelled: Non-Party Intervention and the Public Litigation Model in the High Court' (2003) 28(2) *Alternative Law Journal* 69, 70.

²³ *Royal Women's Hospital v Medical Practitioners Board of Victoria* [2006] VSCA 85 (20 April 2006), [71].

²⁴ See Kenny, 'Interveners and Amici Curiae in the High Court' (1998) 20 *Adelaide Law Review* 159, 169; George Williams, 'The Amicus Curiae and Intervener in the High Court of Australia: A Comparative Analysis' (2000) 28 *Federal Law Review* 365, 394.

The Human Rights Law Resource Centre recommends that the following proposals be developed with respect to third-party interveners.

Recommendation 1: The *Supreme Court Rules* or a practice note should be amended to include clear guidelines as to the procedure for applying to appear as amicus curiae and the appropriate form of the application. The guidelines should provide that:

- (a) amicus curiae applications be made by way of summons and affidavit annexing an outline of submissions; and
- (b) amicus curiae applications should be heard, where possible, at least two weeks before the substantive hearing in the matter.

Recommendation 2: The *Supreme Court Rules* or a practice note should establish clear guidelines as to the factors that the Court will take into account when considering whether to grant an amicus curiae application, including:

- (a) whether or not the case raises issues of public importance, or formulates or elucidates principles of law;
- (b) whether the applicant has some expertise, knowledge, information or insight that the parties are not able ('could') or willing to ('would') provide;
- (c) whether the Court will be significantly assisted by the submission of the amicus curiae;
- (d) whether it is in the interests of justice that the amicus curiae be permitted to make its submissions (taking into account issues of efficiency of the Court process, delay to the parties, cost to the other parties);²⁵
- (e) the particular circumstances of the case.

Recommendation 3: To assist with the ongoing development and clarification of jurisprudence in relation to the consideration of amicus curiae applications, the Court should be required to provide reasons for decisions on amicus applications.²⁶

Recommendation 4: The *Supreme Court Rules* or a practice note should explicitly empower the Court to impose 'conditions' when granting an amicus curiae application. These conditions may define the scope of the amicus' participation by, for example, limiting the amicus' participation to written submissions, or limiting the time that will be allowed for oral submissions.

Recommendation 5: The *Supreme Court Rules* or a practice note should provide guidance in relation to how the Court will deal with multiple amicus applications.

Recommendation 6: The *Supreme Court Rules* or a practice note should clearly state that:

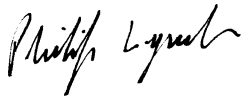
- (a) costs relating to the substantive proceedings will not be awarded against an amicus applicant;
- (b) costs relating to the amicus application will not be awarded against an amicus applicant whose application is in the 'public interest' unless it can be shown that the conduct of the non-party constitutes an abuse of the amicus process.

²⁵ In most instances at least one party will be inconvenienced by the amicus application to some extent. The inconvenience to the parties needs to be weighed against the assistance that will be brought to the Court.

²⁶ Australian Law Reform Commission, *Behind the Door Keeper: Standing to Sue for Public Remedies*, Report No 78 (1996) [6.37] (Recommendation 7).

The Human Rights Law Resource Centre would welcome the opportunity to discuss this submission further.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Philip Lynch', written in a cursive style.

Philip Lynch
Director and Principal Solicitor

Ben Schokman
Human Rights Lawyer



HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE
Ninetieth session
Geneva, 9 to 27 July 2007

General Comment No. 32

Article 14: Right to equality before courts and tribunals and to a fair trial

I. GENERAL REMARKS

1. This general comment replaces general comment No. 13 (twenty-first session).
2. The right to equality before the courts and tribunals and to a fair trial is a key element of human rights protection and serves as a procedural means to safeguard the rule of law. Article 14 of the Covenant aims at ensuring the proper administration of justice, and to this end guarantees a series of specific rights.
3. Article 14 is of a particularly complex nature, combining various guarantees with different scopes of application. The first sentence of paragraph 1 sets out a general guarantee of equality before courts and tribunals that applies regardless of the nature of proceedings before such bodies. The second sentence of the same paragraph entitles individuals to a fair and public hearing by a competent, independent and impartial tribunal established by law, if they face any criminal charges or if their rights and obligations are determined in a suit at law. In such proceedings the media and the public may be excluded from the hearing only in the cases specified in the third sentence of paragraph 1. Paragraphs 2 – 5 of the article contain procedural guarantees available to persons charged with a criminal offence. Paragraph 6 secures a substantive right to compensation in cases of miscarriage of justice in criminal cases. Paragraph 7 prohibits double jeopardy and thus guarantees a substantive freedom, namely the right to remain free from being tried or punished again for an offence for which an individual has already been finally convicted or acquitted. States parties to the Covenant, in their reports, should clearly distinguish between these different aspects of the right to a fair trial.
4. Article 14 contains guarantees that States parties must respect, regardless of their legal traditions and their domestic law. While they should report on how these guarantees are

interpreted in relation to their respective legal systems, the Committee notes that it cannot be left to the sole discretion of domestic law to determine the essential content of Covenant guarantees.

5. While reservations to particular clauses of article 14 may be acceptable, a general reservation to the right to a fair trial would be incompatible with the object and purpose of the Covenant.¹

6. While article 14 is not included in the list of non-derogable rights of article 4, paragraph 2 of the Covenant, States derogating from normal procedures required under article 14 in circumstances of a public emergency should ensure that such derogations do not exceed those strictly required by the exigencies of the actual situation. The guarantees of fair trial may never be made subject to measures of derogation that would circumvent the protection of non-derogable rights. Thus, for example, as article 6 of the Covenant is non-derogable in its entirety, any trial leading to the imposition of the death penalty during a state of emergency must conform to the provisions of the Covenant, including all the requirements of article 14.² Similarly, as article 7 is also non-derogable in its entirety, no statements or confessions or, in principle, other evidence obtained in violation of this provision may be invoked as evidence in any proceedings covered by article 14, including during a state of emergency,³ except if a statement or confession obtained in violation of article 7 is used as evidence that torture or other treatment prohibited by this provision occurred.⁴ Deviating from fundamental principles of fair trial, including the presumption of innocence, is prohibited at all times.⁵

II. EQUALITY BEFORE COURTS AND TRIBUNALS

7. The first sentence of article 14, paragraph 1 guarantees in general terms the right to equality before courts and tribunals. This guarantee not only applies to courts and tribunals addressed in the second sentence of this paragraph of article 14, but must also be respected whenever domestic law entrusts a judicial body with a judicial task.⁶

8. The right to equality before courts and tribunals, in general terms, guarantees, in addition to the principles mentioned in the second sentence of Article 14, paragraph 1, those of equal access and equality of arms, and ensures that the parties to the proceedings in question are treated without any discrimination.

9. Article 14 encompasses the right of access to the courts in cases of determination of criminal charges and rights and obligations in a suit at law. Access to administration of justice must effectively be guaranteed in all such cases to ensure that no individual is deprived, in procedural terms, of his/her right to claim justice. The right of access to courts and tribunals and equality before them is not limited to citizens of States parties, but must also

¹ General comment, No. 24 (1994) on issues relating to reservations made upon ratification or accession to the Covenant or the Optional Protocols thereto, or in relation to declarations under article 41 of the Covenant, para. 8.

² General comment No. 29 (2001) on article 4: Derogations during a state of emergency, para. 15.

³ Ibid, paras. 7 and 15.

⁴ Cf. Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, article 15.

⁵ General comment No. 29 (2001) on article 4: Derogations during a state of emergency, para. 11.

⁶ Communication No. 1015/2001, *Pertterer v. Austria*, para. 9.2 (disciplinary proceedings against a civil servant); Communication No. 961/2000, *Everett v. Spain*, para. 6.4 (extradition).

be available to all individuals, regardless of nationality or statelessness, or whatever their status, whether asylum seekers, refugees, migrant workers, unaccompanied children or other persons, who may find themselves in the territory or subject to the jurisdiction of the State party. A situation in which an individual's attempts to access the competent courts or tribunals are systematically frustrated de jure or de facto runs counter to the guarantee of article 14, paragraph 1, first sentence.⁷ This guarantee also prohibits any distinctions regarding access to courts and tribunals that are not based on law and cannot be justified on objective and reasonable grounds. The guarantee is violated if certain persons are barred from bringing suit against any other persons such as by reason of their race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.⁸

10. The availability or absence of legal assistance often determines whether or not a person can access the relevant proceedings or participate in them in a meaningful way. While article 14 explicitly addresses the guarantee of legal assistance in criminal proceedings in paragraph 3 (d), States are encouraged to provide free legal aid in other cases, for individuals who do not have sufficient means to pay for it. In some cases, they may even be obliged to do so. For instance, where a person sentenced to death seeks available constitutional review of irregularities in a criminal trial but does not have sufficient means to meet the costs of legal assistance in order to pursue such remedy, the State is obliged to provide legal assistance in accordance with article 14, paragraph 1, in conjunction with the right to an effective remedy as enshrined in article 2, paragraph 3 of the Covenant.⁹

11. Similarly, the imposition of fees on the parties to proceedings that would de facto prevent their access to justice might give rise to issues under article 14, paragraph 1.¹⁰ In particular, a rigid duty under law to award costs to a winning party without consideration of the implications thereof or without providing legal aid may have a deterrent effect on the ability of persons to pursue the vindication of their rights under the Covenant in proceedings available to them.¹¹

12. The right of equal access to a court, embodied in article 14, paragraph 1, concerns access to first instance procedures and does not address the issue of the right to appeal or other remedies.¹²

13. The right to equality before courts and tribunals also ensures equality of arms. This means that the same procedural rights are to be provided to all the parties unless distinctions are based on law and can be justified on objective and reasonable grounds, not entailing actual disadvantage or other unfairness to the defendant.¹³ There is no equality of arms if, for instance, only the prosecutor, but not the defendant, is allowed to appeal a certain decision.¹⁴

⁷ Communication No. 468/1991, *Oló Bahamonde v. Equatorial Guinea*, para. 9.4.

⁸ Communication No. 202/1986, *Ato del Avellanal v. Peru*, para. 10.2 (limitation of the right to represent matrimonial property before courts to the husband, thus excluding married women from suing in court). See also general comment No. 18 (1989) on non-discrimination, para. 7.

⁹ Communications No. 377/1989, *Currie v. Jamaica*, para. 13.4; No. 704/1996, *Shaw v. Jamaica*, para. 7.6; No. 707/1996, *Taylor v. Jamaica*, para. 8.2; No. 752/1997, *Henry v. Trinidad and Tobago*, para. 7.6; No. 845/1998, *Kennedy v. Trinidad and Tobago*, para. 7.10.

¹⁰ Communication No. 646/1995, *Lindon v. Australia*, para. 6.4.

¹¹ Communication No. 779/1997, *Äärelä and Näkkäläjärvi v. Finland*, para. 7.2.

¹² Communication No. 450/1991, *I.P. v. Finland*, para. 6.2.

¹³ Communication No. 1347/2005, *Dudko v. Australia*, para. 7.4.

¹⁴ Communication No. 1086/2002, *Weiss v. Austria*, para. 9.6. For another example of a violation of the principle of equality of arms see Communication No. 223/1987, *Robinson v. Jamaica*, para. 10.4 (adjournment of hearing).

The principle of equality between parties applies also to civil proceedings, and demands, *inter alia*, that each side be given the opportunity to contest all the arguments and evidence adduced by the other party.¹⁵ In exceptional cases, it also might require that the free assistance of an interpreter be provided where otherwise an indigent party could not participate in the proceedings on equal terms or witnesses produced by it be examined.

14. Equality before courts and tribunals also requires that similar cases are dealt with in similar proceedings. If, for example, exceptional criminal procedures or specially constituted courts or tribunals apply in the determination of certain categories of cases,¹⁶ objective and reasonable grounds must be provided to justify the distinction.

III. FAIR AND PUBLIC HEARING BY A COMPETENT, INDEPENDENT AND IMPARTIAL TRIBUNAL

15. The right to a fair and public hearing by a competent, independent and impartial tribunal established by law is guaranteed, according to the second sentence of article 14, paragraph 1, in cases regarding the determination of criminal charges against individuals or of their rights and obligations in a suit at law. Criminal charges relate in principle to acts declared to be punishable under domestic criminal law. The notion may also extend to acts that are criminal in nature with sanctions that, regardless of their qualification in domestic law, must be regarded as penal because of their purpose, character or severity.¹⁷

16. The concept of determination of rights and obligations “in a suit at law” (*de caractère civil/de carácter civil*) is more complex. It is formulated differently in the various languages of the Covenant that, according to article 53 of the Covenant, are equally authentic, and the *travaux préparatoires* do not resolve the discrepancies in the various language texts. The Committee notes that the concept of a “suit at law” or its equivalents in other language texts is based on the nature of the right in question rather than on the status of one of the parties or the particular forum provided by domestic legal systems for the determination of particular rights.¹⁸ The concept encompasses (a) judicial procedures aimed at determining rights and obligations pertaining to the areas of contract, property and torts in the area of private law, as well as (b) equivalent notions in the area of administrative law such as the termination of employment of civil servants for other than disciplinary reasons,¹⁹ the determination of social security benefits²⁰ or the pension rights of soldiers,²¹ or procedures regarding the use of public land²² or the taking of private property. In addition, it may (c) cover other procedures which, however, must be assessed on a case by case basis in the light of the nature of the right in question.

¹⁵ Communication No. 846/1999, *Jansen-Gielen v. The Netherlands*, para. 8.2 and No. 779/1997, *Äärelä and Näkkäläjärvi v. Finland*, para. 7.4.

¹⁶ E.g. if jury trials are excluded for certain categories of offenders (see concluding observations, *United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland*, CCPR/CO/73/UK (2001), para. 18) or offences.

¹⁷ Communication No. 1015/2001, *Pertterer v. Austria*, para. 9.2.

¹⁸ Communication No. 112/1981, *Y.L. v. Canada*, paras. 9.1 and 9.2.

¹⁹ Communication No. 441/1990, *Casanovas v. France*, para. 5.2.

²⁰ Communication No. 454/1991, *Garcia Pons v. Spain*, para. 9.3

²¹ Communication No. 112/1981, *Y.L. v. Canada*, para. 9.3.

²² Communication No. 779/1997, *Äärelä and Näkkäläjätvi v. Finland*, paras. 7.2 – 7.4.

17. On the other hand, the right to access a court or tribunal as provided for by article 14, paragraph 1, second sentence, does not apply where domestic law does not grant any entitlement to the person concerned. For this reason, the Committee held this provision to be inapplicable in cases where domestic law did not confer any right to be promoted to a higher position in the civil service,²³ to be appointed as a judge²⁴ or to have a death sentence commuted by an executive body.²⁵ Furthermore, there is no determination of rights and obligations in a suit at law where the persons concerned are confronted with measures taken against them in their capacity as persons subordinated to a high degree of administrative control, such as disciplinary measures not amounting to penal sanctions being taken against a civil servant,²⁶ a member of the armed forces, or a prisoner. This guarantee furthermore does not apply to extradition, expulsion and deportation procedures.²⁷ Although there is no right of access to a court or tribunal as provided for by article 14, paragraph 1, second sentence, in these and similar cases, other procedural guarantees may still apply.²⁸

18. The notion of a “tribunal” in article 14, paragraph 1 designates a body, regardless of its denomination, that is established by law, is independent of the executive and legislative branches of government or enjoys in specific cases judicial independence in deciding legal matters in proceedings that are judicial in nature. Article 14, paragraph 1, second sentence, guarantees access to such tribunals to all who have criminal charges brought against them. This right cannot be limited, and any criminal conviction by a body not constituting a tribunal is incompatible with this provision. Similarly, whenever rights and obligations in a suit at law are determined, this must be done at least at one stage of the proceedings by a tribunal within the meaning of this sentence. The failure of a State party to establish a competent tribunal to determine such rights and obligations or to allow access to such a tribunal in specific cases would amount to a violation of article 14 if such limitations are not based on domestic legislation, are not necessary to pursue legitimate aims such as the proper administration of justice, or are based on exceptions from jurisdiction deriving from international law such, for example, as immunities, or if the access left to an individual would be limited to an extent that would undermine the very essence of the right.

19. The requirement of competence, independence and impartiality of a tribunal in the sense of article 14, paragraph 1, is an absolute right that is not subject to any exception.²⁹ The requirement of independence refers, in particular, to the procedure and qualifications for the appointment of judges, and guarantees relating to their security of tenure until a mandatory retirement age or the expiry of their term of office, where such exist, the conditions governing promotion, transfer, suspension and cessation of their functions, and the actual independence of the judiciary from political interference by the executive branch and legislature. States should take specific measures guaranteeing the independence of the judiciary, protecting judges from any form of political influence in their decision-making through the constitution or adoption of laws establishing clear procedures and objective criteria for the appointment, remuneration, tenure, promotion, suspension and dismissal of the members of the judiciary and disciplinary sanctions taken against them.³⁰ A situation where the functions and

²³ Communication No. 837/1998, *Kolanowski v. Poland*, para. 6.4.

²⁴ Communications No. 972/2001, *Kazantzis v. Cyprus*, para. 6.5; No. 943/2000, *Jacobs v. Belgium*, para. 8.7, and No. 1396/2005, *Rivera Fernández v. Spain*, para. 6.3.

²⁵ Communication No. 845/1998, *Kennedy v. Trinidad and Tobago*, para. 7.4.

²⁶ Communication No. 1015/2001, *Perterer v. Austria*, para. 9.2 (disciplinary dismissal).

²⁷ Communications No. 1341/2005, *Zundel v. Canada*, para. 6.8, No. 1359/2005, *Esposito v. Spain*, para. 7.6.

²⁸ See para. 62 below.

²⁹ Communication No. 263/1987, *Gonzalez del Rio v. Peru*, para. 5.2.

³⁰ Concluding observations, Slovakia, CCPR/C/79/Add.79 (1997), para. 18.

competencies of the judiciary and the executive are not clearly distinguishable or where the latter is able to control or direct the former is incompatible with the notion of an independent tribunal.³¹ It is necessary to protect judges against conflicts of interest and intimidation. In order to safeguard their independence, the status of judges, including their term of office, their independence, security, adequate remuneration, conditions of service, pensions and the age of retirement shall be adequately secured by law.

20. Judges may be dismissed only on serious grounds of misconduct or incompetence, in accordance with fair procedures ensuring objectivity and impartiality set out in the constitution or the law. The dismissal of judges by the executive, e.g. before the expiry of the term for which they have been appointed, without any specific reasons given to them and without effective judicial protection being available to contest the dismissal is incompatible with the independence of the judiciary.³² The same is true, for instance, for the dismissal by the executive of judges alleged to be corrupt, without following any of the procedures provided for by the law.³³

21. The requirement of impartiality has two aspects. First, judges must not allow their judgement to be influenced by personal bias or prejudice, nor harbour preconceptions about the particular case before them, nor act in ways that improperly promote the interests of one of the parties to the detriment of the other.³⁴ Second, the tribunal must also appear to a reasonable observer to be impartial. For instance, a trial substantially affected by the participation of a judge who, under domestic statutes, should have been disqualified cannot normally be considered to be impartial.³⁵

22. The provisions of article 14 apply to all courts and tribunals within the scope of that article whether ordinary or specialized, civilian or military. The Committee notes the existence, in many countries, of military or special courts which try civilians. While the Covenant does not prohibit the trial of civilians in military or special courts, it requires that such trials are in full conformity with the requirements of article 14 and that its guarantees cannot be limited or modified because of the military or special character of the court concerned. The Committee also notes that the trial of civilians in military or special courts may raise serious problems as far as the equitable, impartial and independent administration of justice is concerned. Therefore, it is important to take all necessary measures to ensure that such trials take place under conditions which genuinely afford the full guarantees stipulated in article 14. Trials of civilians by military or special courts should be exceptional,³⁶ i.e. limited to cases where the State party can show that resorting to such trials is necessary and justified by objective and serious reasons, and where with regard to the specific class of individuals and offences at issue the regular civilian courts are unable to undertake the trials.³⁷

23. Some countries have resorted to special tribunals of “faceless judges” composed of anonymous judges, e.g. within measures taken to fight terrorist activities. Such courts, even if the identity and status of such judges has been verified by an independent authority, often suffer not only from the fact that the identity and status of the judges is not made known to

³¹ Communication No. 468/1991, *Oló Bahamonde v. Equatorial Guinea*, para. 9.4.

³² Communication No. 814/1998, *Pastukhov v. Belarus*, para. 7.3.

³³ Communication No. 933/2000, *Mundy Busyo et al v. Democratic Republic of Congo*, para. 5.2.

³⁴ Communication No. 387/1989, *Karttunen v. Finland*, para. 7.2.

³⁵ *Idem*.

³⁶ Also see Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War of 12 August 1949, art. 64 and general comment No. 31 (2004) on the *Nature of the General Legal Obligation Imposed on States Parties to the Covenant*, para. 11.

³⁷ See communication No. 1172/2003, *Madani v. Algeria*, para. 8.7.

the accused persons but also from irregularities such as exclusion of the public or even the accused or their representatives³⁸ from the proceedings;³⁹ restrictions of the right to a lawyer of their own choice;⁴⁰ severe restrictions or denial of the right to communicate with their lawyers, particularly when held incommunicado;⁴¹ threats to the lawyers;⁴² inadequate time for preparation of the case;⁴³ or severe restrictions or denial of the right to summon and examine or have examined witnesses, including prohibitions on cross-examining certain categories of witnesses, e.g. police officers responsible for the arrest and interrogation of the defendant.⁴⁴ Tribunals with or without faceless judges, in circumstances such as these, do not satisfy basic standards of fair trial and, in particular, the requirement that the tribunal must be independent and impartial.⁴⁵

24. Article 14 is also relevant where a State, in its legal order, recognizes courts based on customary law, or religious courts, to carry out or entrusts them with judicial tasks. It must be ensured that such courts cannot hand down binding judgments recognized by the State, unless the following requirements are met: proceedings before such courts are limited to minor civil and criminal matters, meet the basic requirements of fair trial and other relevant guarantees of the Covenant, and their judgments are validated by State courts in light of the guarantees set out in the Covenant and can be challenged by the parties concerned in a procedure meeting the requirements of article 14 of the Covenant. These principles are notwithstanding the general obligation of the State to protect the rights under the Covenant of any persons affected by the operation of customary and religious courts.

25. The notion of fair trial includes the guarantee of a fair and public hearing. Fairness of proceedings entails the absence of any direct or indirect influence, pressure or intimidation or intrusion from whatever side and for whatever motive. A hearing is not fair if, for instance, the defendant in criminal proceedings is faced with the expression of a hostile attitude from the public or support for one party in the courtroom that is tolerated by the court, thereby impinging on the right to defence,⁴⁶ or is exposed to other manifestations of hostility with similar effects. Expressions of racist attitudes by a jury⁴⁷ that are tolerated by the tribunal, or a racially biased jury selection are other instances which adversely affect the fairness of the procedure.

³⁸ Communication No. 1298/2004, *Becerra Barney v. Colombia*, para.7.2.

³⁹ Communications No. 577/1994, *Polay Campos v. Peru*, para. 8.8; No. 678/1996, *Gutiérrez Vivanco v. Peru*, para. 7.1; No. 1126/2002, *Carranza Alegre v. Peru*, para. 7.5.

⁴⁰ Communication No. 678/1996, *Gutiérrez Vivanco v. Peru*, para. 7.1.

⁴¹ Communication No.577/1994, *Polay Campos v. Peru*, para. 8.8; Communication No. 1126/2002, *Carranza Alegre v. Peru*, para.7.5.

⁴² Communication No. 1058/2002, *Vargas Mas v. Peru*, para. 6.4.

⁴³ Communication No. 1125/2002, *Quispe Roque v. Peru*, para. 7.3.

⁴⁴ Communication No. 678/1996, *Gutiérrez Vivanco v. Peru*, para. 7.1; Communication No. 1126/2002, *Carranza Alegre v. Peru*, para.7.5; Communication No. 1125/2002, *Quispe Roque v. Peru*, para. 7.3; Communication No. 1058/2002, *Vargas Mas v. Peru*, para. 6.4.

⁴⁵ Communications No. 577/1994, *Polay Campos v. Peru*, para. 8.8 ; No. 678/1996, *Gutiérrez Vivanco v. Peru*, para. 7.1.

⁴⁶ Communication No. 770/1997, *Gridin v. Russian Federation*, para. 8.2.

⁴⁷ See Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, communication No. 3/1991, *Narrainen v. Norway*, para. 9.3.

26. Article 14 guarantees procedural equality and fairness only and cannot be interpreted as ensuring the absence of error on the part of the competent tribunal.⁴⁸ It is generally for the courts of States parties to the Covenant to review facts and evidence, or the application of domestic legislation, in a particular case, unless it can be shown that such evaluation or application was clearly arbitrary or amounted to a manifest error or denial of justice, or that the court otherwise violated its obligation of independence and impartiality.⁴⁹ The same standard applies to specific instructions to the jury by the judge in a trial by jury.⁵⁰

27. An important aspect of the fairness of a hearing is its expeditiousness. While the issue of undue delays in criminal proceedings is explicitly addressed in paragraph 3 (c) of article 14, delays in civil proceedings that cannot be justified by the complexity of the case or the behaviour of the parties detract from the principle of a fair hearing enshrined in paragraph 1 of this provision.⁵¹ Where such delays are caused by a lack of resources and chronic underfunding, to the extent possible supplementary budgetary resources should be allocated for the administration of justice.⁵²

28. All trials in criminal matters or related to a suit at law must in principle be conducted orally and publicly. The publicity of hearings ensures the transparency of proceedings and thus provides an important safeguard for the interest of the individual and of society at large. Courts must make information regarding the time and venue of the oral hearings available to the public and provide for adequate facilities for the attendance of interested members of the public, within reasonable limits, taking into account, inter alia, the potential interest in the case and the duration of the oral hearing.⁵³ The requirement of a public hearing does not necessarily apply to all appellate proceedings which may take place on the basis of written presentations,⁵⁴ or to pre-trial decisions made by prosecutors and other public authorities.⁵⁵

29. Article 14, paragraph 1, acknowledges that courts have the power to exclude all or part of the public for reasons of morals, public order (*ordre public*) or national security in a democratic society, or when the interest of the private lives of the parties so requires, or to the extent strictly necessary in the opinion of the court in special circumstances where publicity would be prejudicial to the interests of justice. Apart from such exceptional circumstances, a hearing must be open to the general public, including members of the media, and must not, for instance, be limited to a particular category of persons. Even in cases in which the public is excluded from the trial, the judgment, including the essential findings, evidence and legal reasoning must be made public, except where the interest of juvenile persons otherwise requires, or the proceedings concern matrimonial disputes or the guardianship of children.

⁴⁸ Communications No. 273/1988, *B.d.B. v. The Netherlands*, para. 6.3; No. 1097/2002, *Martínez Mercader et al v. Spain*, para. 6.3.

⁴⁹ Communication No. 1188/2003, *Riedl-Riedenstein et al. v. Germany*, para. 7.3; No. 886/1999, *Bondarenko v. Belarus*, para. 9.3; No. 1138/2002, *Arenz et al. v. Germany*, admissibility decision, para. 8.6.

⁵⁰ Communication No. 253/1987, *Kelly v. Jamaica*, para. 5.13; No. 349/1989, *Wright v. Jamaica*, para. 8.3.

⁵¹ Communication No. 203/1986, *Múnoz Hermoza v. Peru*, para. 11.3 ; No. 514/1992, *Fei v. Colombia*, para. 8.4 .

⁵² See e.g. Concluding observations, *Democratic Republic of Congo*, CCPR/C/COD/CO/3 (2006), para. 21, *Central African Republic*, CCPR//C/CAF/CO/2 (2006), para. 16.

⁵³ Communication No. 215/1986, *Van Meurs v. The Netherlands*, para. 6.2.

⁵⁴ Communication No. 301/1988, *R.M. v. Finland*, para. 6.4.

⁵⁵ Communication No. 819/1998, *Kavanagh v. Ireland*, para. 10.4.

IV. PRESUMPTION OF INNOCENCE

30. According to article 14, paragraph 2 everyone charged with a criminal offence shall have the right to be presumed innocent until proven guilty according to law. The presumption of innocence, which is fundamental to the protection of human rights, imposes on the prosecution the burden of proving the charge, guarantees that no guilt can be presumed until the charge has been proved beyond reasonable doubt, ensures that the accused has the benefit of doubt, and requires that persons accused of a criminal act must be treated in accordance with this principle. It is a duty for all public authorities to refrain from prejudging the outcome of a trial, e.g. by abstaining from making public statements affirming the guilt of the accused.⁵⁶ Defendants should normally not be shackled or kept in cages during trials or otherwise presented to the court in a manner indicating that they may be dangerous criminals. The media should avoid news coverage undermining the presumption of innocence. Furthermore, the length of pre-trial detention should never be taken as an indication of guilt and its degree.⁵⁷ The denial of bail⁵⁸ or findings of liability in civil proceedings⁵⁹ do not affect the presumption of innocence.

V. RIGHTS OF PERSONS CHARGED WITH A CRIMINAL OFFENCE

31. The right of all persons charged with a criminal offence to be informed promptly and in detail in a language which they understand of the nature and cause of criminal charges brought against them, enshrined in paragraph 3 (a), is the first of the minimum guarantees in criminal proceedings of article 14. This guarantee applies to all cases of criminal charges, including those of persons not in detention, but not to criminal investigations preceding the laying of charges.⁶⁰ Notice of the reasons for an arrest is separately guaranteed in article 9, paragraph 2 of the Covenant.⁶¹ The right to be informed of the charge “promptly” requires that information be given as soon as the person concerned is formally charged with a criminal offence under domestic law,⁶² or the individual is publicly named as such. The specific requirements of subparagraph 3 (a) may be met by stating the charge either orally - if later confirmed in writing - or in writing, provided that the information indicates both the law and the alleged general facts on which the charge is based. In the case of trials in absentia, article 14, paragraph 3 (a) requires that, notwithstanding the absence of the accused, all due steps have been taken to inform accused persons of the charges and to notify them of the proceedings.⁶³

⁵⁶ Communication No. 770/1997, *Gridin v. Russian Federation*, paras. 3.5 and 8.3.

⁵⁷ On the relationship between article 14, paragraph 2 and article 9 of the Covenant (pre-trial detention) see, e.g. concluding observations, Italy, CCPR/C/ITA/CO/5 (2006), para. 14 and Argentina, CCPR/CO/70/ARG (2000), para. 10.

⁵⁸ Communication No. 788/1997, *Cagas, Butin and Astillero v. Philippines*, para. 7.3.

⁵⁹ Communication No. 207/1986, *Moraël v. France*, para. 9.5; No. 408/1990, *W.J.H. v. The Netherlands*, para. 6.2; No. 432/1990, *W.B.E. v. The Netherlands*, para. 6.6.

⁶⁰ Communication No. 1056/2002, *Khachatryan v. Armenia*, para. 6.4.

⁶¹ Communication No. 253/1987, *Kelly v. Jamaica*, para. 5.8.

⁶² Communications No. 1128/2002, *Márques de Morais v. Angola*, para. 5.4 and 253/1987, *Kelly v. Jamaica*, para. 5.8.

⁶³ Communication No. 16/1977, *Mbenge v. Zaire*, para. 14.1.

32. Subparagraph 3 (b) provides that accused persons must have adequate time and facilities for the preparation of their defence and to communicate with counsel of their own choosing. This provision is an important element of the guarantee of a fair trial and an application of the principle of equality of arms.⁶⁴ In cases of an indigent defendant, communication with counsel might only be assured if a free interpreter is provided during the pre-trial and trial phase.⁶⁵ What counts as “adequate time” depends on the circumstances of each case. If counsel reasonably feel that the time for the preparation of the defence is insufficient, it is incumbent on them to request the adjournment of the trial.⁶⁶ A State party is not to be held responsible for the conduct of a defence lawyer, unless it was, or should have been, manifest to the judge that the lawyer’s behaviour was incompatible with the interests of justice.⁶⁷ There is an obligation to grant reasonable requests for adjournment, in particular, when the accused is charged with a serious criminal offence and additional time for preparation of the defence is needed.⁶⁸

33. “Adequate facilities” must include access to documents and other evidence; this access must include all materials⁶⁹ that the prosecution plans to offer in court against the accused or that are exculpatory. Exculpatory material should be understood as including not only material establishing innocence but also other evidence that could assist the defence (e.g. indications that a confession was not voluntary). In cases of a claim that evidence was obtained in violation of article 7 of the Covenant, information about the circumstances in which such evidence was obtained must be made available to allow an assessment of such a claim. If the accused does not speak the language in which the proceedings are held, but is represented by counsel who is familiar with the language, it may be sufficient that the relevant documents in the case file are made available to counsel⁷⁰

34. The right to communicate with counsel requires that the accused is granted prompt access to counsel. Counsel should be able to meet their clients in private and to communicate with the accused in conditions that fully respect the confidentiality of their communications.⁷¹ Furthermore, lawyers should be able to advise and to represent persons charged with a criminal offence in accordance with generally recognised professional ethics without restrictions, influence, pressure or undue interference from any quarter.

35. The right of the accused to be tried without undue delay, provided for by article 14, paragraph 3 (c), is not only designed to avoid keeping persons too long in a state of uncertainty about their fate and, if held in detention during the period of the trial, to ensure that such deprivation of liberty does not last longer than necessary in the circumstances of the specific case, but also to serve the interests of justice. What is reasonable has to be assessed in

⁶⁴ Communications No. 282/1988, *Smith v. Jamaica*, para. 10.4; Nos. 226/1987 and 256/1987, *Sawyers, Mclean and Mclean v. Jamaica*, para. 13.6.

⁶⁵ See communication No. 451/1991, *Harward v. Norway*, para. 9.5.

⁶⁶ Communication No. 1128/2002, *Morais v. Angola*, para. 5.6. Similarly Communications No. 349/1989, *Wright v. Jamaica*, para. 8.4; No. 272/1988, *Thomas v. Jamaica*, para. 11.4; No. 230/87, *Henry v. Jamaica*, para. 8.2; Nos. 226/1987 and 256/1987, *Sawyers, Mclean and Mclean v. Jamaica*, para. 13.6.

⁶⁷ Communication No. 1128/2002, *Márques de Morais v. Angola*, para. 5.4.

⁶⁸ Communications No. 913/2000, *Chan v. Guyana*, para. 6.3; No. 594/1992, *Phillip v. Trinidad and Tobago*, para. 7.2.

⁶⁹ See concluding observations, Canada, CCPR/C/CAN/CO/5 (2005), para. 13.

⁷⁰ Communication No. 451/1991, *Harward v. Norway*, para. 9.5.

⁷¹ Communications No. 1117/2002, *Khomidova v. Tajikistan*, para. 6.4; No. 907/2000, *Siragev v. Uzbekistan*, para. 6.3; No. 770/1997, *Gridin v. Russian Federation*, para. 8.5.

the circumstances of each case,⁷² taking into account mainly the complexity of the case, the conduct of the accused, and the manner in which the matter was dealt with by the administrative and judicial authorities. In cases where the accused are denied bail by the court, they must be tried as expeditiously as possible.⁷³ This guarantee relates not only to the time between the formal charging of the accused and the time by which a trial should commence, but also the time until the final judgement on appeal.⁷⁴ All stages, whether in first instance or on appeal must take place “without undue delay.”

36. Article 14, paragraph 3 (d) contains three distinct guarantees. First, the provision requires that accused persons are entitled to be present during their trial. Proceedings in the absence of the accused may in some circumstances be permissible in the interest of the proper administration of justice, i.e. when accused persons, although informed of the proceedings sufficiently in advance, decline to exercise their right to be present. Consequently, such trials are only compatible with article 14, paragraph 3 (d) if the necessary steps are taken to summon accused persons in a timely manner and to inform them beforehand about the date and place of their trial and to request their attendance.⁷⁵

37. Second, the right of all accused of a criminal charge to defend themselves in person or through legal counsel of their own choosing and to be informed of this right, as provided for by article 14, paragraph 3 (d), refers to two types of defence which are not mutually exclusive. Persons assisted by a lawyer have the right to instruct their lawyer on the conduct of their case, within the limits of professional responsibility, and to testify on their own behalf. At the same time, the wording of the Covenant is clear in all official languages, in that it provides for a defence to be conducted in person “or” with legal assistance of one’s own choosing, thus providing the possibility for the accused to reject being assisted by any counsel. This right to defend oneself without a lawyer is, however not absolute. The interests of justice may, in the case of a specific trial, require the assignment of a lawyer against the wishes of the accused, particularly in cases of persons substantially and persistently obstructing the proper conduct of trial, or facing a grave charge but being unable to act in their own interests, or where this is necessary to protect vulnerable witnesses from further distress or intimidation if they were to be questioned by the accused. However, any restriction of the wish of accused persons to defend themselves must have an objective and sufficiently serious purpose and not go beyond what is necessary to uphold the interests of justice. Therefore, domestic law should avoid any absolute bar against the right to defend oneself in criminal proceedings without the assistance of counsel.⁷⁶

38. Third, article 14, paragraph 3 (d) guarantees the right to have legal assistance assigned to accused persons whenever the interests of justice so require, and without payment by them in any such case if they do not have sufficient means to pay for it. The gravity of the

⁷² See e.g. communication No. 818/1998, *Sextus v Trinidad and Tobago*, para. 7.2 regarding a delay of 22 months between the charging of the accused with a crime carrying the death penalty and the beginning of the trial without specific circumstances justifying the delay. In communication No. 537/1993, *Kelly v. Jamaica*, para. 5.11, an 18 months delay between charges and beginning of the trial did not violate art. 14, para. 3 (c). See also communication No. 676/1996, *Yasseen and Thomas v. Guyana*, para. 7.11 (delay of two years between a decision by the Court of Appeal and the beginning of a retrial) and communication No. 938/2000, *Siewpersaud, Sukhrum, and Persaud v. Trinidad v Tobago*, para. 6.2 (total duration of criminal proceedings of almost five years in the absence of any explanation from the State party justifying the delay).

⁷³ Communication No. 818/1998, *Sextus v. Trinidad and Tobago*, para. 7.2.

⁷⁴ Communications No. 1089/2002, *Rouse v. Philippines*, para.7.4; No. 1085/2002, *Taright, Touadi, Remli and Yousfi v. Algeria*, para. 8.5.

⁷⁵ Communications No. 16/1977, *Mbenge v. Zaire*, para. 14.1; No. 699/1996, *Maleki v. Italy*, para. 9.3.

⁷⁶ Communication No. 1123/2002, *Correia de Matos v. Portugal*, paras. 7.4 and 7.5.

offence is important in deciding whether counsel should be assigned “in the interest of justice”⁷⁷ as is the existence of some objective chance of success at the appeals stage.⁷⁸ In cases involving capital punishment, it is axiomatic that the accused must be effectively assisted by a lawyer at all stages of the proceedings.⁷⁹ Counsel provided by the competent authorities on the basis of this provision must be effective in the representation of the accused. Unlike in the case of privately retained lawyers,⁸⁰ blatant misbehaviour or incompetence, for example the withdrawal of an appeal without consultation in a death penalty case,⁸¹ or absence during the hearing of a witness in such cases⁸² may entail the responsibility of the State concerned for a violation of article 14, paragraph 3 (d), provided that it was manifest to the judge that the lawyer’s behaviour was incompatible with the interests of justice.⁸³ There is also a violation of this provision if the court or other relevant authorities hinder appointed lawyers from fulfilling their task effectively.⁸⁴

39. Paragraph 3 (e) of article 14 guarantees the right of accused persons to examine, or have examined, the witnesses against them and to obtain the attendance and examination of witnesses on their behalf under the same conditions as witnesses against them. As an application of the principle of equality of arms, this guarantee is important for ensuring an effective defence by the accused and their counsel and thus guarantees the accused the same legal powers of compelling the attendance of witnesses and of examining or cross-examining any witnesses as are available to the prosecution. It does not, however, provide an unlimited right to obtain the attendance of any witness requested by the accused or their counsel, but only a right to have witnesses admitted that are relevant for the defence, and to be given a proper opportunity to question and challenge witnesses against them at some stage of the proceedings. Within these limits, and subject to the limitations on the use of statements, confessions and other evidence obtained in violation of article 7,⁸⁵ it is primarily for the domestic legislatures of States parties to determine the admissibility of evidence and how their courts assess it.

40. The right to have the free assistance of an interpreter if the accused cannot understand or speak the language used in court as provided for by article 14, paragraph 3 (f) enshrines another aspect of the principles of fairness and equality of arms in criminal proceedings.⁸⁶ This right arises at all stages of the oral proceedings. It applies to aliens as well as to nationals. However, accused persons whose mother tongue differs from the official court language are, in principle, not entitled to the free assistance of an interpreter if they know the official language sufficiently to defend themselves effectively.⁸⁷

⁷⁷ Communication No. 646/1995, *Lindon v. Australia*, para. 6.5.

⁷⁸ Communication No. 341/1988, *Z.P. v. Canada*, para. 5.4.

⁷⁹ Communications No. 985/2001, *Aliboeva v. Tajikistan*, para. 6.4; No. 964/2001, *Saidova v. Tajikistan*, para. 6.8; No. 781/1997, *Aliev v. Ukraine*, para. 7.3; No. 554/1993, *LaVende v. Trinidad and Tobago*, para. 58.

⁸⁰ Communication No. 383/1989, *H.C. v. Jamaica*, para. 6.3.

⁸¹ Communication No. 253/1987, *Kelly v. Jamaica*, para. 9.5.

⁸² Communication No. 838/1998, *Hendricks v. Guyana*, para. 6.4. For the case of an absence of an author’s legal representative during the hearing of a witness in a preliminary hearing see Communication No. 775/1997, *Brown v. Jamaica*, para. 6.6.

⁸³ Communications No. 705/1996, *Taylor v. Jamaica*, para. 6.2 ; No. 913/2000, *Chan v. Guyana*, para. 6.2; No. 980/2001, *Hussain v. Mauritius*, para. 6.3.

⁸⁴ Communication No. 917/2000, *Arutyunyan v. Uzbekistan*, para. 6.3.

⁸⁵ See para. 6 above.

⁸⁶ Communication No. 219/1986, *Guesdon v. France*, para. 10.2.

⁸⁷ *Idem*.

41. Finally, article 14, paragraph 3 (g), guarantees the right not to be compelled to testify against oneself or to confess guilt. This safeguard must be understood in terms of the absence of any direct or indirect physical or undue psychological pressure from the investigating authorities on the accused, with a view to obtaining a confession of guilt. A fortiori, it is unacceptable to treat an accused person in a manner contrary to article 7 of the Covenant in order to extract a confession.⁸⁸ Domestic law must ensure that statements or confessions obtained in violation of article 7 of the Covenant are excluded from the evidence, except if such material is used as evidence that torture or other treatment prohibited by this provision occurred,⁸⁹ and that in such cases the burden is on the State to prove that statements made by the accused have been given of their own free will.⁹⁰

VI. JUVENILE PERSONS

42. Article 14, paragraph 4, provides that in the case of juvenile persons, procedures should take account of their age and the desirability of promoting their rehabilitation. Juveniles are to enjoy at least the same guarantees and protection as are accorded to adults under article 14 of the Covenant. In addition, juveniles need special protection. In criminal proceedings they should, in particular, be informed directly of the charges against them and, if appropriate, through their parents or legal guardians, be provided with appropriate assistance in the preparation and presentation of their defence; be tried as soon as possible in a fair hearing in the presence of legal counsel, other appropriate assistance and their parents or legal guardians, unless it is considered not to be in the best interest of the child, in particular taking into account their age or situation. Detention before and during the trial should be avoided to the extent possible.⁹¹

43. States should take measures to establish an appropriate juvenile criminal justice system, in order to ensure that juveniles are treated in a manner commensurate with their age. It is important to establish a minimum age below which children and juveniles shall not be put on trial for criminal offences; that age should take into account their physical and mental immaturity.

44. Whenever appropriate, in particular where the rehabilitation of juveniles alleged to have committed acts prohibited under penal law would be fostered, measures other than criminal proceedings, such as mediation between the perpetrator and the victim, conferences with the family of the perpetrator, counselling or community service or educational programmes, should be considered, provided they are compatible with the requirements of this Covenant and other relevant human rights standards.

VII. REVIEW BY A HIGHER TRIBUNAL

45. Article 14, paragraph 5 of the Covenant provides that anyone convicted of a crime shall have the right to have their conviction and sentence reviewed by a higher tribunal

⁸⁸ Communications No. 1208/2003, *Kurbonov v. Tajikistan*, paras. 6.2 – 6.4; No. 1044/2002, *Shukurova v. Tajikistan*, paras. 8.2 – 8.3; No. 1033/2001, *Singarasa v. Sri Lanka*, para. 7.4; ; No. 912/2000, *Deolall v. Guyana*, para. 5.1; No. 253/1987, *Kelly v. Jamaica*, para. 5.5.

⁸⁹ Cf. Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, art. 15. On the use of other evidence obtained in violation of article 7 of the Covenant, see paragraph 6 above.

⁹⁰ Communications No. 1033/2001, *Singarasa v. Sri Lanka*, para. 7.4; No. 253/1987, *Kelly v. Jamaica*, para. 7.4.

⁹¹ See general comment No. 17 (1989) on article 24 (Rights of the child), para. 4.

according to law. As the different language versions (crime, *infraction*, *delito*) show, the guarantee is not confined to the most serious offences. The expression “according to law” in this provision is not intended to leave the very existence of the right of review to the discretion of the States parties, since this right is recognised by the Covenant, and not merely by domestic law. The term according to law rather relates to the determination of the modalities by which the review by a higher tribunal is to be carried out,⁹² as well as which court is responsible for carrying out a review in accordance with the Covenant. Article 14, paragraph 5 does not require States parties to provide for several instances of appeal.⁹³ However, the reference to domestic law in this provision is to be interpreted to mean that if domestic law provides for further instances of appeal, the convicted person must have effective access to each of them.⁹⁴

46. Article 14, paragraph 5 does not apply to procedures determining rights and obligations in a suit at law⁹⁵ or any other procedure not being part of a criminal appeal process, such as constitutional motions.⁹⁶

47. Article 14, paragraph 5 is violated not only if the decision by the court of first instance is final, but also where a conviction imposed by an appeal court⁹⁷ or a court of final instance,⁹⁸ following acquittal by a lower court, according to domestic law, cannot be reviewed by a higher court. Where the highest court of a country acts as first and only instance, the absence of any right to review by a higher tribunal is not offset by the fact of being tried by the supreme tribunal of the State party concerned; rather, such a system is incompatible with the Covenant, unless the State party concerned has made a reservation to this effect.⁹⁹

48. The right to have one’s conviction and sentence reviewed by a higher tribunal established under article 14, paragraph 5, imposes on the State party a duty to review substantively, both on the basis of sufficiency of the evidence and of the law, the conviction and sentence, such that the procedure allows for due consideration of the nature of the case.¹⁰⁰ A review that is limited to the formal or legal aspects of the conviction without any consideration whatsoever of the facts is not sufficient under the Covenant.¹⁰¹ However, article 14, paragraph 5 does not require a full retrial or a “hearing”,¹⁰² as long as the tribunal carrying

⁹² Communications No. 1095/2002, *Gomariz Valera v. Spain*, para. 7.1; No. 64/1979, *Salgar de Montejó v. Colombia*, para.10.4.

⁹³ Communication No. 1089/2002, *Rouse v. Philippines*, para. 7.6.

⁹⁴ Communication No. 230/1987, *Henry v. Jamaica*, para. 8.4.

⁹⁵ Communication No. 450/1991, *I.P. v. Finland*, para. 6.2.

⁹⁶ Communication No. 352/1989, *Douglas, Gentles, Kerr v. Jamaica*, para. 11.2.

⁹⁷ Communication No. 1095/2002, *Gomariz Valera v. Spain*, para. 7.1.

⁹⁸ Communication No. 1073/2002, *Terrón v Spain*, para. 7.4.

⁹⁹ *Idem*.

¹⁰⁰ Communications No. 1100/2002, *Bandajevsky v. Belarus*, para. 10.13; No. 985/2001, *Aliboeva v. Tajikistan*, para. 6.5; No. 973/2001, *Khalilova v. Tajikistan*, para. 7.5; No. 623-627/1995, *Domukovsky et al. v. Georgia*, para.18.11; No. 964/2001, *Saidova v. Tajikistan*, para. 6.5; No. 802/1998, *Rogerson v. Australia*, para. 7.5; No. 662/1995, *Lumley v. Jamaica*, para. 7.3.

¹⁰¹ Communication No. 701/1996, *Gómez Vázquez v. Spain*, para. 11.1.

¹⁰² Communication No. 1110/2002, *Rolando v. Philippines*, para. 4.5; No. 984/2001, *Juma v. Australia*, para. 7.5; No. 536/1993, *Perera v. Australia*, para. 6.4.

out the review can look at the factual dimensions of the case. Thus, for instance, where a higher instance court looks at the allegations against a convicted person in great detail, considers the evidence submitted at the trial and referred to in the appeal, and finds that there was sufficient incriminating evidence to justify a finding of guilt in the specific case, the Covenant is not violated.¹⁰³

49. The right to have one's conviction reviewed can only be exercised effectively if the convicted person is entitled to have access to a duly reasoned, written judgement of the trial court, and, at least in the court of first appeal where domestic law provides for several instances of appeal,¹⁰⁴ also to other documents, such as trial transcripts, necessary to enjoy the effective exercise of the right to appeal.¹⁰⁵ The effectiveness of this right is also impaired, and article 14, paragraph 5 violated, if the review by the higher instance court is unduly delayed in violation of paragraph 3 (c) of the same provision.¹⁰⁶

50. A system of supervisory review that only applies to sentences whose execution has commenced does not meet the requirements of article 14, paragraph 5, regardless of whether such review can be requested by the convicted person or is dependent on the discretionary power of a judge or prosecutor.¹⁰⁷

51. The right of appeal is of particular importance in death penalty cases. A denial of legal aid by the court reviewing the death sentence of an indigent convicted person constitutes not only a violation of article 14, paragraph 3 (d), but at the same time also of article 14, paragraph 5, as in such cases the denial of legal aid for an appeal effectively precludes an effective review of the conviction and sentence by the higher instance court.¹⁰⁸ The right to have one's conviction reviewed is also violated if defendants are not informed of the intention of their counsel not to put any arguments to the court, thereby depriving them of the opportunity to seek alternative representation, in order that their concerns may be ventilated at the appeal level.¹⁰⁹

VIII. COMPENSATION IN CASES OF MISCARRIAGE OF JUSTICE

52. According to paragraph 6 of article 14 of the Covenant, compensation according to the law shall be paid to persons who have been convicted of a criminal offence by a final decision and have suffered punishment as a consequence of such conviction, if their conviction has been reversed or they have been pardoned on the ground that a new or newly

¹⁰³ E.g. communications No. 1156/2003, *Pérez Escobar v. Spain*, para. 3; No. 1389/2005, *Bertelli Gálvez v. Spain*, para. 4.5.

¹⁰⁴ Communications No. 903/1999, *Van Hulst v. Netherlands*, para. 6.4; No. 709/1996, *Bailey v. Jamaica*, para. 7.2; No. 663/1995, *Morrison v. Jamaica*, para. 8.5.

¹⁰⁵ Communication No. 662/1995, *Lumley v. Jamaica*, para. 7.5.

¹⁰⁶ Communications No. 845/1998, *Kennedy v. Trinidad and Tobago*, para. 7.5; No. 818/1998, *Sextus v. Trinidad and Tobago*, para. 7.3; No. 750/1997, *Daley v. Jamaica*, para. 7.4; No. 665/1995, *Brown and Parish v. Jamaica*, para. 9.5; No. 614/1995, *Thomas v. Jamaica*, para. 9.5; No. 590/1994, *Bennet v. Jamaica*, para. 10.5.

¹⁰⁷ Communications No. 1100/2002, *Bandajevsky v. Belarus*, para. 10.13; No. 836/1998, *Gelazauskas v. Lithuania*, para. 7.2.

¹⁰⁸ Communication No. 554/1993, *LaVende v. Trinidad and Tobago*, para. 5.8.

¹⁰⁹ See communications No. 750/1997, *Daley v. Jamaica*, para. 7.5; No. 680/1996, *Gallimore v. Jamaica*, para. 7.4; No. 668/1995, *Smith and Stewart v. Jamaica*, para. 7.3. See also Communication No. 928/2000, *Sooklal v. Trinidad and Tobago*, para. 4.10.

discovered fact shows conclusively that there has been a miscarriage of justice.¹¹⁰ It is necessary that States parties enact legislation ensuring that compensation as required by this provision can in fact be paid and that the payment is made within a reasonable period of time.

53. This guarantee does not apply if it is proved that the non-disclosure of such a material fact in good time is wholly or partly attributable to the accused; in such cases, the burden of proof rests on the State. Furthermore, no compensation is due if the conviction is set aside upon appeal, i.e. before the judgement becomes final,¹¹¹ or by a pardon that is humanitarian or discretionary in nature, or motivated by considerations of equity, not implying that there has been a miscarriage of justice.¹¹²

1 IX. *NE BIS IN IDEM*

54. Article 14, paragraph 7 of the Covenant, providing that no one shall be liable to be tried or punished again for an offence of which they have already been finally convicted or acquitted in accordance with the law and penal procedure of each country, embodies the principle of *ne bis in idem*. This provision prohibits bringing a person, once convicted or acquitted of a certain offence, either before the same court again or before another tribunal again for the same offence; thus, for instance, someone acquitted by a civilian court cannot be tried again for the same offence by a military or special tribunal. Article 14, paragraph 7 does not prohibit retrial of a person convicted in absentia who requests it, but applies to the second conviction.

55. Repeated punishment of conscientious objectors for not having obeyed a renewed order to serve in the military may amount to punishment for the same crime if such subsequent refusal is based on the same constant resolve grounded in reasons of conscience.¹¹³

56. The prohibition of article 14, paragraph 7, is not at issue if a higher court quashes a conviction and orders a retrial.¹¹⁴ Furthermore, it does not prohibit the resumption of a criminal trial justified by exceptional circumstances, such as the discovery of evidence which was not available or known at the time of the acquittal.

57. This guarantee applies to criminal offences only and not to disciplinary measures that do not amount to a sanction for a criminal offence within the meaning of article 14 of the Covenant.¹¹⁵ Furthermore, it does not guarantee *ne bis in idem* with respect to the national jurisdictions of two or more States.¹¹⁶ This understanding should not, however, undermine efforts by States to prevent retrial for the same criminal offence through international conventions.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁰ Communications No. 963/2001, *Uebergang v. Australia*, para. 4.2; No. 880/1999, *Irving v. Australia*, para. 8.3; No. 408/1990, *W.J.H. v. Netherlands*, para. 6.3.

¹¹¹ Communications No. 880/1999; *Irving v. Australia*, para. 8.4; No. 868/1999, *Wilson v. Philippines*, para. 6.6.

¹¹² Communication No. 89/1981, *Muhonen v. Finland*, para. 11.2.

¹¹³ See United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, Opinion No. 36/1999 (Turkey), E./CN.4/2001/14/Add. 1, para. 9 and Opinion No. 24/2003 (Israel), E/CN.4/2005/6/Add. 1, para. 30.

¹¹⁴ Communication No. 277/1988, *Terán Jijón v. Ecuador*, para. 5.4.

¹¹⁵ Communication No. 1001/2001, *Gerardus Strik v. The Netherlands*, para. 7.3.

¹¹⁶ Communications No. 692/1996, *A.R.J. v. Australia*, para. 6.4; No. 204/1986, *A.P. v. Italy*, para. 7.3.

¹¹⁷ See, e.g. Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, article 20, para. 3.

X. RELATIONSHIP OF ARTICLE 14 WITH OTHER PROVISIONS OF THE COVENANT

58. As a set of procedural guarantees, article 14 of the Covenant often plays an important role in the implementation of the more substantive guarantees of the Covenant that must be taken into account in the context of determining criminal charges and rights and obligations of a person in a suit at law. In procedural terms, the relationship with the right to an effective remedy provided for by article 2, paragraph 3 of the Covenant is relevant. In general, this provision needs to be respected whenever any guarantee of article 14 has been violated.¹¹⁸ However, as regards the right to have one's conviction and sentence reviewed by a higher tribunal, article 14, paragraph 5 of the Covenant is a *lex specialis* in relation to article 2, paragraph 3 when invoking the right to access a tribunal at the appeals level.¹¹⁹

59. In cases of trials leading to the imposition of the death penalty scrupulous respect of the guarantees of fair trial is particularly important. The imposition of a sentence of death upon conclusion of a trial, in which the provisions of article 14 of the Covenant have not been respected, constitutes a violation of the right to life (article 6 of the Covenant).¹²⁰

60. To ill-treat persons against whom criminal charges are brought and to force them to make or sign, under duress, a confession admitting guilt violates both article 7 of the Covenant prohibiting torture and inhuman, cruel or degrading treatment and article 14, paragraph 3 (g) prohibiting compulsion to testify against oneself or confess guilt.¹²¹

61. If someone suspected of a crime and detained on the basis of article 9 of the Covenant is charged with an offence but not brought to trial, the prohibitions of unduly delaying trials as provided for by articles 9, paragraph 3, and 14, paragraph 3 (c) of the Covenant may be violated at the same time.¹²²

62. The procedural guarantees of article 13 of the Covenant incorporate notions of due process also reflected in article 14¹²³ and thus should be interpreted in the light of this latter provision. Insofar as domestic law entrusts a judicial body with the task of deciding about expulsions or deportations, the guarantee of equality of all persons before the courts and tribunals as enshrined in article 14, paragraph 1, and the principles of impartiality, fairness and equality of arms implicit in this guarantee are applicable.¹²⁴ All relevant guarantees of

¹¹⁸ E.g. Communications No. 1033/2001, *Singarasa v. Sri Lanka*, para. 7.4; No. 823/1998, *Czernin v. Czech Republic*, para. 7.5.

¹¹⁹ Communication No. 1073/2002, *Terrón v. Spain*, para. 6.6.

¹²⁰ E.g. communications No. 1044/2002, *Shakurova v. Tajikistan*, para. 8.5 (violation of art. 14 para. 1 and 3 (b), (d) and (g)); No. 915/2000, *Ruzmetov v. Uzbekistan*, para. 7.6 (violation of art. 14, para. 1, 2 and 3 (b), (d), (e) and (g)); No. 913/2000, *Chan v. Guyana*, para. 5.4 (violation of art. 14 para. 3 (b) and (d)); No. 1167/2003, *Rayos v. Philippines*, para. 7.3 (violation of art. 14 para. 3(b)).

¹²¹ Communications No. 1044/2002, *Shakurova v. Tajikistan*, para. 8.2; No. 915/2000, *Ruzmetov v. Uzbekistan*, paras. 7.2 and 7.3; No. 1042/2001, *Boimurodov v. Tajikistan*, para. 7.2, and many others. On the prohibition to admit evidence in violation of article 7, see paragraphs. 6 and 41 above.

¹²² Communications No. 908/2000, *Evans v. Trinidad and Tobago*, para. 6.2; No. 838/1998, *Hendricks v. Guayana*, para. 6.3, and many more.

¹²³ Communication No. 1051/2002 *Ahani v. Canada*, para. 10.9. See also communication No. 961/2000, *Everett v. Spain*, para. 6.4 (extradition), 1438/2005, *Taghi Khadje v. Netherlands*, para. 6.3.

¹²⁴ See communication No. 961/2000, *Everett v. Spain*, para. 6.4.

article 14, however, apply where expulsion takes the form of a penal sanction or where violations of expulsion orders are punished under criminal law.

63. The way criminal proceedings are handled may affect the exercise and enjoyment of rights and guarantees of the Covenant unrelated to article 14. Thus, for instance, to keep pending, for several years, indictments for the criminal offence of defamation brought against a journalist for having published certain articles, in violation of article 14, paragraph 3 (c), may leave the accused in a situation of uncertainty and intimidation and thus have a chilling effect which unduly restricts the exercise of his right to freedom of expression (article 19 of the Covenant).¹²⁵ Similarly, delays of criminal proceedings for several years in contravention of article 14, paragraph 3 (c), may violate the right of a person to leave one's own country as guaranteed in article 12, paragraph 2 of the Covenant, if the accused has to remain in that country as long as proceedings are pending.¹²⁶

64. As regards the right to have access to public service on general terms of equality as provided for in article 25 (c) of the Covenant, a dismissal of judges in violation of this provision may amount to a violation of this guarantee, read in conjunction with article 14, paragraph 1 providing for the independence of the judiciary.¹²⁷

65. Procedural laws or their application that make distinctions based on any of the criteria listed in article 2, paragraph 1 or article 26, or disregard the equal right of men and women, in accordance with article 3, to the enjoyment of the guarantees set forth in article 14 of the Covenant, not only violate the requirement of paragraph 1 of this provision that "all persons shall be equal before the courts and tribunals," but may also amount to discrimination.¹²⁸

¹²⁵ Communication No. 909/2000, *Mujuwana Kankanamge v. Sri Lanka*, para. 9.4.

¹²⁶ Communication No. 263/1987, *Gonzales del Rio v. Peru*, paras. 5.2 and 5.3.

¹²⁷ Communications No. 933/2000, *Mundy Busyo et al. v. Democratic Republic of Congo*, para. 5.2.; No. 814/1998, *Pastukhov v. Belarus*, para. 7.3.

¹²⁸ Communication No. 202/1986, *Ato del Avellanal v. Peru*, paras. 10.1 and 10.2.