

OPEN LETTER TO MEMBERS OF THE UN'S GENERAL ASSEMBLY REGARDING THE ECOSOC COMMITTEE ON NGOS

To: Member States of the UN General Assembly

Cc: President of ECOSOC, President of the General Assembly, President of the Human Rights Council, UN Secretary General.

30th March, 2021

Excellencies:

We are one year out from elections to the ECOSOC Committee on Non-Governmental Organisations for the 2023-2026 term. These elections provide states with a commitment to ensuring civil society access and participation, with the opportunity to stand as candidates for membership. They are also the moment for members of ECOSOC to vote with integrity, ensuring the new membership of its subsidiary body is fit to fulfil its mandate.

To coincide with the 75th Anniversary of the founding of the United Nations, Member States recently committed to boost partnerships – to make the UN more inclusive and engage with all relevant stakeholders ‘to ensure an effective response to our common challenges’. In recommending approval of the participation of non-governmental organisations in a range of UN bodies and processes, the Committee on NGOs plays a key role in facilitating such partnerships. A membership of states committed to fulfilling such a task fairly and judiciously is essential.

With this in mind, we would like to make the **following recommendations**:

1/ States with an interest in facilitating and safeguarding civil society access to and participation in UN processes should stand for election to the Committee.

2/ Candidates should make public the reasons for their candidacy and their commitment to fulfil their responsibilities as members of the Committee, as per ECOSOC Resolution 1996/31.

3/ All regions should put up competitive slates, as the Asia-Pacific and GRULAC regions did in the last elections for the Committee in 2018. Competitive elections are important to create buy-in to the process and encourage states to be accountable for their commitments.

4/ All regions should make public candidacies at least two months before the elections to allow for proper consideration of candidates.

5/ All ECOSOC members should vote (and be encouraged to vote) only for candidates with positive track records in regard to civil society access and participation. Candidates could be assessed in regard to indicators such as support for relevant UN resolutions, such as those on civil society space and human rights defenders; on responses to cases of intimidation and reprisals; and on national level initiatives to safeguard civic space, press freedom – online as offline – and the right to defend human rights.

6/ ECOSOC members should consider introducing term limits for membership of the Committee on NGOs, among other reforms encouraging openness and accountability. As with other UN bodies, states should be required to leave the Committee for a specific interval of time after serving for a maximum agreed period. Term limits would encourage greater diversity in membership over time and encourage states to step up as candidates.

The Committee on NGOs is entrusted with an important task in opening the door of the UN to the expertise and experience of civil society partners. It requires members that are committed to fulfilling the Committee's mandate in a fair, transparent, non-discriminatory, expeditious and apolitical manner. It falls to all member states – as potential candidates and / or electors – to ensure that the Committee membership is fit for purpose.

Yours sincerely,

Access Now

Alliance for Democracy in Laos

Alliance for Equality and Diversity

Asian Legal Resource Centre

Asociación Española para el Derecho Internacional de los Derechos Humanos

Association de Solidarite Aide et Action Enfance Mali-Jiguiya Ton

Association for Community Research & Action

Association of War Affected Women

Bahrain Center for Human Rights

Botswana Watch Organization

Child Rights International Network

CIVICUS

Christian Solidarity Worldwide CSW

Collectif Sénégalais des Africaines pour la Promotion de l'Education Relative à l'Environnement

Colonie des Pionniers du Développement CPD

Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative

DefendDefenders (East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project)

Digital Empowerment Foundation

Edmund Rice International Ltd.

Equal Rights for Persons with Disabilities International, Inc.

Families of the Missing

FIDA Nigeria	Jerusalem Center for Women
FOKUS – Forum for Women and Development	Journalists and Writers Foundation
Freedom Now	Jubilee Campaign
Global Bersih	KULU – Women and Development
Global Justice Center	Namibia Diverse Women’s Association
Global Peace and Development Organization	Network of Rural Women Producers
Graduate Women International	New Future Foundation
Guyana RainBow Foundation (GuyBow)	Nkomo Organization Inc.
Helpline Foundation for the Needy Abuja	Ohaha Family Foundation
HIV Legal Network	Omega Research Foundation
Human Rights Defenders Network-SL	Outright Action International
Human Rights House Foundation	Pan Pacific and South-East Asia Women’s Association (PPSEAWA)
Human Rights Watch	PEPA l’Humanitaire
International Alliance of Women	Pleaders of Children and Elderly People at Risk-PEPA/NGO
International Dalit Solidarity Network	Refugee Council of Australia
International Disability Alliance	Sahkar Social Welfare Association
IFBPW (International Federation of Business and Professional Women)	Servicios Ecumenicos para Reconciliacion y Recostruccion
International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF)	SERVITAS Cameroon
International Planned Parenthood Federation Western Hemisphere Region (IPPFWHR)	Sisters of Charity Federation
International Service for Human Rights	South Sudanese Christian Women Mission for Peace
Light Organization for Relief and Development Africa (LFORD AFRICA)	Swedish Association for Sexuality Education (RFSU)
	TRIAL International

The Light Millennium

Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights

Unspoken Smiles Foundation

Validity Foundation – Mental Disability Advocacy Centre

Visaka Dharmadasa

Women4nonviolence

World Uyghur Congress

Yemeni Institute for Strategic Affairs

Yemen Organization for Defending Rights & Democratic Freedoms

Zonta International