**NGO General Statement: Committee on NGOs resumed session, January 2018**

Delivered in name of Amnesty International, Civicus: World Alliance for Citizen Participation, Conectas Diretos Humanos, Human Rights Watch, Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights, International Commission of Jurists, International Service for Human Rights and Outright Action International.

29th January 2018

Thank you Mr. Chair.

I welcome this opportunity to address the Committee on NGOs.

I am particularly pleased to be speaking at only the second session the Committee on NGOs is being webcast. We very much welcome the decision by ECOSOC to make these sessions more accessible to civil society representatives around the world.

The Committee on NGOs plays a hugely important role in recommending accreditation to NGOs. This is critical to enabling NGO participation at the UN. NGO participation has long been recognized as key to contributing to efforts to fulfil the purposes of the UN Charter.

We know that the Committee on NGOs has been criticized a lot– by States, UN officials and NGOs. Concern has been expressed at several Committee practices including repeated questioning of applicants and multiple deferrals of applications, for no good reason. To counter these, increased transparency and accountability of Committee practices and greater accessibility to Committee processes are essential.

We are glad that a meeting between ECOSOC accredited NGOs and the NGO Committee has been scheduled for the inter-session. Whilst this exchange has been a requirement as set forth in ECOSOC Resolution 1996/31, the upcoming meeting will be the first. It is well overdue. The Committee has responsibility to monitor the ‘evolving relationship’ between NGOs and the UN. We hope these regular opportunities to exchange views will assist in better defining the vitally important, constructive relationship between civil society and Member States.

We urge the Committee to ensure that the meeting planned provides for remote participation by accredited NGOs who are unable to travel. Clearly access to UN conversations should not be limited to those who have resources to travel to New York or Geneva or other major UN hubs. A diversity of voices should be heard. We hope that States will ensure that the principle of accessibility to UN processes will be applied when defining working methods for the upcoming meeting.

Safeguarding civil society space at the UN is an essential component in the struggle to protect civil society space globally and to provide a voice to the voiceless. We call on all States with a commitment to defending the work of civil society to consider putting themselves forward as candidates of the Committee on NGOs. Action to defend civil society space at the UN starts here at this very Committee.