

## Statement to ECOSOC Committee on NGOs – 24 May 2016

Thank you Mr. Chair

My name is Eleanor Openshaw. I represent the International Service for Human Rights, an NGO working to support human rights defenders and strengthen human rights systems. I'd like to thank the Committee for giving me the opportunity to make this statement.

I wish to speak to the contents of a letter sent on behalf of 230 NGOs from 45 countries around the world this morning, calling on Member States of ECOSOC to ensure that the practice and procedures of the Committee on NGOs are in keeping with the principles, spirit and purpose of ECOSOC resolution 1996/31 and in strict compliance with international human rights standards.

We are concerned by some Committee members' use of procedural tactics to delay or effectively block certain organisations from being granted consultative status.

In his 2014 report to the UNGA, the Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association, Maina Kiai, criticized the Committee's multiple deferrals and perpetual questioning of some applicant NGOs, noting that 'Member States and the UN have a legal obligation to strengthen civil society participation in the UN'.

The value of the participation of NGOs in the work of UN is widely acknowledged, including by the Secretary General who has noted that 'Civil society is an indispensable partner of the United Nations'.

ECOSOC resolution 1996/31 – which sets out the mandate of this Committee – acknowledges 'the breadth of NGOs' expertise and the capacity of NGOs to support the work of the UN'.

It is clear that the engagement of NGOs with the UN – which is enabled in many cases through the ECOSOC accreditation – is valuable. It is also a right. Indeed, the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders stipulates that everyone has a 'right, individually and in association with others, to unhindered access and communication with international bodies.'

The 230 signatories to the letter to ECOSOC members request that:

- 1/ The practice and procedures of the Committee be in keeping with the principles, spirit and purpose of ECOSOC resolution 1996/31 and in strict compliance with international human rights standards.
- 2/ That the Committee practice be uniformly applied, apolitical, fair, transparent, non-discriminatory, consistent and expeditious.
- 3/ The Committee actions not hinder the right of NGOs to access and communicate with the UN, whether by design or in their impact.
- 4/ ECOSOC members take into account of the recommendations made by Chile, Mexico and Uruguay at the ECOSOC session last July, to institute webcasting of the sessions of the Committee. This would enable NGOs whose applications are being considered– and do not have the resources to travel to NY for Committee sessions, to follow proceedings.

Unfortunately in too many instances the Committee is reflective of the growing restrictions on civil society at the very time restrictions at the national level make access to the UN all the more crucial.

We request that the Committee redouble its efforts to promote a safe, transparent and enabling environment for civil society at the UN. By fostering such an environment, the UN can take full advantage of the particular expertise and insights provided by NGOs and enhance the legitimacy and credibility of its own work.