

Joint civil society statement - Organizational meeting 9 December 2022

Civil society participation is a cornerstone of the Human Rights Council. Without adequate consultation, decisions on issues relating to participation and procedure will be taken without full consideration of all key stakeholders, to the detriment of the Council's effectiveness.

While many proposals were made to reinstate some form of general debates in June during the discussions around the efficiency process, we regret that the draft President's statement renews for yet another year the decision not to hold general debates during its June session.

We call on the Human Rights Council bureau and the 47 HRC member states to:

- **Reinstate General Debates in June** sessions and maintain unrestricted General Debates.
- Ensure that **efficiency is not prioritised over effectiveness, expertise and inclusiveness**, including by addressing the chronic underfunding of the UN's human rights pillar.
- Institutionalise the good practice set by HRC president in 2022 where he responded to civil society's [ask](#) to act as the **civil society focal point in the HRC Bureau**, in order to facilitate their engagement throughout the year, particularly with regard to issues that affect civil society participation and to combat reprisals.
- **Maintain hybrid modalities** (remote participation in all debates and informal consultations) for all Observers of the Council (states and civil society organisations with ECOSOC status) regardless of the Covid-19 measures, as complementary to in-person participation

Hybrid modalities are long standing demands of civil society organizations prior to Covid-19 and made for a more inclusive and accessible HRC. Remote participation provides opportunities to overcome barriers faced by civil society organisations, including, but not limited to, denial of visas, resource challenges, travel costs, environmental considerations, and accessibility for people with disabilities.

Inclusive participation of civil society actors helps ensure that the HRC is informed and responsive to human rights priorities and needs on the ground. Hybrid modalities enable the engagement of organisations based outside Geneva, as well as under-resourced civil society actors. It ensures access for victims, survivors, and their families and for child and youth led movements and gender/sexual diverse advocates, who are otherwise rarely heard.

The General Assembly resolution 60/251 does not make a distinction between different kinds of Observers of the Council. Therefore, post Covid-19 modalities, in particular remote participation in debates and informal consultations, should apply in the same manner to both Observer states and civil society organisations with the ECOSOC status. Remote participation can also help to reduce the carbon footprint of HRC meetings, which is an important consideration with respect to the current climate crisis and its impact on human rights.

Additionally, General Debates are the only opportunity for states, as well as for NGOs, to address countries that are not formally on the Council's agenda. They are essential for the HRC to exercise its prevention mandate and its mandate to "address situations of violations of human rights, including gross and systematic violations, and make recommendations

thereon” (UN General Assembly resolution 60/251, paragraph 3). Cancellation of GDs in June (when many reports/discussions around gender take place) prevents women’s rights groups and defenders to adequately address the Council including on gender-based violence and discrimination based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI).

All voices matter. Space for civil society must be promoted and safeguarded at the HRC so they can be heard and the Council can be fully informed of human rights priorities and needs on the ground. As we today celebrate international Human Rights Defenders Day, we say #NoCouncilWithoutUs

Signatories

1. Addameer Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association
2. African Center for Democracy and Human Rights Studies
3. Al Mezan Center for Human Rights
4. Al-dameer Foundation for Rights and Freedoms
5. Al-Haq
6. AMAC-Associação Moçambicana de Advogados Cristãos
7. American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)
8. Amnesty International
9. Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)
10. Asian Legal Resource Centre
11. Asian Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women (ARROW)
12. Association for Progressive Communications (APC)
13. AWID (Association for Women's Rights in Development)
14. BADIL Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights
15. Bisan Center for Research and Development
16. Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies
17. Center for Defense of Liberties & Civil Rights "HURRYAT"
18. Center for Strategic Studies to support women and children
19. Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales (CELS)
20. Child Rights Connect
21. CHOICE for Youth and Sexuality
22. CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation
23. Committee for the Defence of Human Rights - CDHR
24. Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI)
25. Conectas Direitos Humanos
26. DefendDefenders (East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project)
27. Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR)
28. Families of Truth and Justice
29. FEDERA Foundation for Women and Family Planning
30. GIN-SSOGIE NPO
31. Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect
32. Gulf Centre for Human Rights
33. Habitat International Coalition

34. Human Rights & Democracy Media Center "SHAMS"
35. Human Rights House Foundation
36. Human Rights Watch
37. Iniciativa mesoamericana de mujeres defensoras de derechos humanos
38. International Commission of Jurists
39. International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)
40. International Network on the Prevention of Elder Abuse (INPEA)
41. International Service for Human Rights
42. Justitia center for legal protection of human rights in Algeria
43. Musaala Organization for Human Rights
44. Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR)
45. PASS Foundation - Peace for Sustainable Societies
46. Réseau Ouest Africain des Défenseurs des Droits Humains / West African Human Rights Defenders' Network (ROADDH/WAHRDN)
47. Sexual Rights Initiative (SRI)
48. Southern Africa Human Rights Defenders Network (SouthernDefenders)
49. Southern Africa Women Human Rights Defenders Network (SAWHRDN)
50. Syrian Legal Development Programme (SLDP)
51. The Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy - MIFTAH
52. The Palestinian Non-Governmental Organizations (PNGO)
53. UPR Info
54. Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)
55. World Uyghur Congress
56. Yemen Future for Culture and Media Development