



Paper on NGO Participation at the United Nations

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NGOs contribute valuable information and ideas, advocate effectively for positive change, provide essential operational capacity in emergencies and development efforts, and generally increase the accountability and legitimacy of the global governance process. The United Nations must strengthen and deepen its relations with NGOs in order to create a stronger, more effective and more legitimate organization. In reply to the request by the General Assembly's President for comments and input on UN/NGO relations the following points are emphasized as a way to strengthen NGO participation at the UN:

(1) Do No Harm

New proposals for reform of the UN should not reduce existing rights, responsibilities and forms of NGO access and participation. All UN agencies should recognize the value of cooperation with NGOs at consultative, deliberative and implementing levels of UN policies and actions.

(2) Human Rights Council

The new Human Rights Council must honor NGO rights stipulated in ECOSOC Resolution 1996/31 from the Commission, as provided by the GA Resolution A/RES/60/251. Likewise, NGOs should be fully involved in discussions leading to the adoption of new rules and procedures for the Human Rights Council. The transfer from the Commission to the Council must not weaken or eliminate any of the current NGO rights and privileges with the Commission.

(3)Peacebuilding Commission

In contrast to the strong language on NGO rights in the Human Rights Council resolution, the resolution on the Peacebuilding Commission (A/RES/60/180) only contains vague provisions for NGO consultations. Clear means must be developed for NGOs to interact and, as appropriate, participate in deliberations of the Peacebuilding Commission.

(4)Hearings Do Not Replace Global Conferences & PrepComs

Complementary to other forms of participation, hearings can serve to present the experiences and positions of NGOs to governments and the UN. While hearings may have a value in promoting NGO input in addressing specific issues, they should complement rather than replace more extensive and effective forms of NGO participation. The model of the global conferences of the 1990s, with a series of preparatory committee meetings in the run-up, provides a much better means for NGO contribution and contact with delegations in the negotiating process, as well as discussion between governments and NGOs at the national level. The consultative and open process provided by the Prep Coms ensures dedicated participation by both governments, international organizations and NGOs and inspires far greater ownership of the outcome by all parties. The UN should return to this method for all substantial decision-making processes. The "multi-stakeholder dialogues," now gaining wide currency, have not proven to be effective mechanisms. They rarely encourage real dialogue and frequently are poorly attended by member states.

(5)Headquarters Renovation & the UN Physical Plant

NGOs must be assured full access during the lengthy process of Headquarters renovation and full consultations should take place on this matter. NGOs should have an opportunity to give input into the UN Capital Master Plan to insure that NGO needs are met in the design. In the meantime, earphones in public galleries should immediately be made fully workable to enable NGO access to the debates.

(6)NGLS

NGLS must continue to enjoy independent status within the UN system. Its annual budget of approximately \$1 million must be fully supported. The UN regular budget should bear a substantial proportion (at least half) of the budget requirement and other UN agencies, programs and funds should pick up the remainder.

(7)An NGO Portfolio in the Executive Office of the Secretary General

The Secretary General should name a high-level person in his office to assume the role of facilitating relations with NGOs. No one in the Executive Office has had this responsibility since the departure of ASG Gillian Martin Sorensen in 2003.

(8)GA "Hearings" on NGO Access and Participation

To promote intergovernmental action on NGO access and participation issues, the GA President should hold "hearings" so as to clarify issues and develop a clear path forward. The hearings must be open and inclusive, with the maximum participation of NGOs from the South. There should be a possibility to submit written statements for those unable to travel.

(9)NGO Role with ECOSOC & the UNGA

Plans for reform of ECOSOC should take into account new ways for NGOs to consult with the Council, as well as re-enforcing existing arrangements. The General Assembly should also consider additional ways to formalize consultative arrangements with NGOs, which at present are primarily informal and ad hoc. A formal role for NGOs should be arranged on a more permanent basis, in particular for the standing committees. Use of existing ECOSOC and DPI procedures should continue to be the basis for NGO status.

(10)Consult with NGOs Worldwide

The UN should redouble its efforts to consult with NGOs worldwide, especially in developing countries. A fund to assist southern NGOs' participation in meetings and conferences should receive solid support from donor countries.