

Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd

Submissions pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 32/31 on Civil Society Space

My organization welcomes this opportunity to give input on resolution 32/31 on Civil Society Space adopted by the Human Rights Council on 1 July 2016. We fully agree with the “*crucial importance of the active involvement of civil society, at all levels, in processes of governance and in promoting good governance, including through transparency and accountability, at all levels, which is indispensable for building peaceful, prosperous and democratic societies.*” Likewise, we share the concern that “*in some instances, domestic legal and administrative provisions, such as national security and counter-terrorism legislation, and other measures... have sought to or have been misused to hinder the work and endanger the safety of civil society*”. *Excerpt from the Resolution adopted by the Human Rights Council on 1 July 2016 on civil society space.*

Civil society has been a fundamental structure of the UN since its beginning with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) taking a formal role through the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in 1946. Article 71 of the UN Charter opened the door for suitable arrangements for consultation with NGOs.

Since 1946 there has been constant growth in the number of affiliated NGOs and their intensity of participation. While such expansion may present some logistical or space problems, the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) within the United Nations system is more vital than ever in the establishment and implementation of policies at the international level.

NGOs are active and have expertise on vital issues of our time, including women/girls, eradication of poverty, environment, health, human rights, grassroots development, humanitarian relief, environmental protection, population control, conflict resolution, prevention, democratization, particular campaigns and so on.

Networking, especially transnational networking is a key method used by NGOs that supports alliances among many types of organizations — membership groups, academic institutions, religious bodies, research bodies, ad hoc groupings, and smaller national NGOs – allowing optimal voice for all

The role of NGO representatives is to influence policies through participation in the entire policy-making process and to exhibit the actual effect of policy on national levels. Likewise, informed by national level experience and on-the ground work, NGOs can present good practices, and evaluations of practical policy outcomes to the international level. The ability of NGOs to appeal to and discuss with diplomats of governments is crucial.

Challenges faced by NGOs

Given the diverse nature and large number of NGOs, relations between NGOs and the UN have at times been stormy. NGOs face constant barriers and hindrances to be heard at the UN; often NGOs are set aside due to competition for government attention with businesses and private sector organizations.

The access of NGOs can be quite uneven and arbitrary within the UN system. While some NGOs enjoy excellent access to meetings and good relations with UN officials and delegations, governments sometimes react negatively to NGO advocacy and seek to restrict NGO opportunities.

NGOs face increasing difficulties in their advocacy work at national and UN levels. NGOs have to deal with bureaucratic obstacles even if they have ECOSOC Status with UN and not all Governments are providing a more enabling and cooperative environment for civil society.

Despite the important role in conflict resolution, NGOs are struggling to provide relief and assistance under conditions of civil war, brutal poverty, and natural disasters, often without any participation in decision making.

In many countries, attacks on human rights defenders are becoming more frequent, with an alarming rise in the level of violence and threats against them. Perpetrators are seldom brought to justice. Harassment, intimidation and reprisals against NGO delegates attending some Human Rights Council sessions and other Committees in Geneva have increased in recent years. Several organizations are seriously alarmed by government's restrictions, especially the restrictions preventing engagement with the UN.

Recommendations:

- Encourage a further recognition of the Civil Society's role as partners in the UN system in conducting negotiations at national and international level.
- Increase openness for NGOs' participation, taking advantage in their expertise, in multiple formats of advisory groups in the UN system.
- Give further opportunities to NGOs to participate in the implementation of policies development and programs in partnership with some UN offices/agencies to be meaningful at the grassroots levels.
- Encourage the UN system to open and inclusive dialogue with NGOs. This process brings about broader points of view and more creative, flexible approaches in the resolution of problems at national and international level.
- Enhance partnership with NGOs for best utilization of resources and networking; this would enhance the worldwide presence of NGOs, even under-resourced NGOs who nevertheless have great expertise, in several countries and all regions.
- Support publication and dissemination of NGO submissions to delegates at relevant international meetings.
- Call on governments and international community to create a safe environment for NGOs' activities and human rights defenders. Governments must act to stop reprisals against NGOs and human rights defenders who are engaging with international mechanisms including the UN system.

In conclusion, the contribution and participation of NGOs, at all levels in the UN system, are effective and imperative. Positive and open relationships between NGOs and the UN can help the United Nations to reach its global goals and enhance implementation of policy to the people of the world. Our NGO will remain engaged within the UN system, submitting high quality and credible contributions when requested, reporting to committees, and bringing the voice of voiceless and the most vulnerable people to international negotiations. We look forward to UN support in fostering our ability to participate and contribute.

Website: www.buonpastoreint.org/jp-en

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