

## **Expert Workshop on the Right to Participate in Public Affairs**

**18 May 2016, Conference Room VII,  
Palais des Nations, Geneva**

### **CONCEPT NOTE**

#### **I. INTRODUCTION**

1. The Human Rights Council has adopted several resolutions pertinent to the right to participate in public affairs in recent years, including resolution 24/8 of 26 September 2013 on equal political participation, and 27/24 of 3 October 2014 on equal participation in political and public affairs. In its resolution 30/9 entitled "Equal participation in political and public affairs" adopted on 1 October 2015, the Human Rights Council requested the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to organize, prior to its thirty-second session in June 2016, an expert workshop to discuss the existing guidance on the implementation of the right to participate in public affairs, with the aim of identifying possible gaps and making recommendations in this regard, as well as new developments, trends and innovations with respect to full, effective and equal participation in political and public affairs."

#### **II. BACKGROUND**

2. The right to participate in public affairs, as enshrined in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Article 25), and further elaborated upon in other international instruments, is of critical importance for democracy, the rule of law, social inclusion, and advancing gender equality, and for the realization of all human rights. However, the effective implementation of this human right is often challenged by numerous barriers in law and in practice – discrimination on various grounds, restrictive policies, insufficient political will, general distrust in public authorities, decline in traditional forms of political participation or structural inequalities.
3. There is a need to work further on the implementation of the right to participate in public affairs in the context of article 25 of the ICCPR, including by identifying possible gaps in existing guidance on the implementation of this right. At the same

time, there are numerous examples of good practices and innovative measures adopted around the world on how to effectively tackle and overcome these multiple challenges and to increase participation.

### **III. EXPERT WORKSHOP**

#### **Date and Venue**

4. Pursuant to Human Rights Council Resolution 30/9, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights will organise an expert workshop on equal participation in political and public affairs. This expert workshop will take place on **18 May 2016 in Geneva (Palais des Nations, Conference room VII) from 10.00 to 13.00 and 15.00 to 18.00.**

#### **Participants and Logistical Arrangements**

5. In conformity with operative paragraph 8(b) of Council resolution 30/9, the expert workshop will bring together States, relevant United Nations bodies, funds and programmes, intergovernmental organizations, treaty bodies, special procedures, regional human rights mechanisms, civil society organizations, academia, national human rights institutions and other relevant stakeholders. Experts will be invited to share their views and experiences with participants.
6. The expert workshop will be held in all six official languages of the United Nations.

#### **Methodology**

7. In accordance with paragraph 8 (a) of Council resolution 30/9, the expert workshop will “discuss the existing guidance on the implementation of the right to participate in public affairs, with the aim of identifying possible gaps and making recommendations in this regard, as well as new developments, trends and innovations with respect to full, effective and equal participation in political and public affairs”. After the experts from each panel conclude their presentation, there will be time allotted for statements, questions and discussion with States, non-governmental organizations and other stakeholders participating in the meeting.
8. Following an opening session, the expert workshop will be structured around three expert panels on the following themes:

#### *Session 1: The right to participate in public affairs and existing guidance*

Human Rights Council resolution 30/9 recognized the need for further work on the full and effective implementation of the right to participate in public affairs, including by identifying possible gaps in existing guidance on the implementation of this right. Therefore, after briefly

recalling the legal framework for the exercise of the right to participate in public affairs, the first session of the workshop will be devoted to an exploration and discussion of international guidance documents with regard to the right to participate in public affairs and whether and how they are used by States. The session will also explore the possible need for comprehensive and up-to-date guidance that would facilitate States' efforts to implement their obligations to ensure the full realization of the right to participate in public affairs. Further, the session, as the other two sessions, will discuss sharing of experiences and the importance of international cooperation and exchange of good practices in effective implementation of the right to participate in public affairs.

### *Session 2: Current challenges to the implementation of the right to participate in public affairs*

Resolution 30/9 recognized the need to intensify efforts to eliminate barriers in law and in practice to the right to participate in public affairs. Therefore, session 2 of the workshop will be devoted to a discussion on challenges and barriers that the right to participate in public affairs continues to face (e.g. discrimination) and explore causes for such obstacles. Specific attention will be given to the difficulties faced by individuals from disadvantaged groups and communities in the enjoyment of the right to participate in public affairs, as well as to the need for a gender approach to equal political participation. The session will provide an opportunity to discuss the implications of restrictions on the right to freedom of expression and of peaceful assembly and association on the enjoyment of the right to participate in public affairs. The session will also examine aspects of economic, social, and cultural rights, and development programmes with regards to implementation of the right to participate in public affairs as well as participatory approaches in the context of economic, social and cultural rights.

### *Session 3: Innovations and trends on the right to participate in public affairs*

The aim of the third session of the workshop will be to identify and share good practices and experiences with the respect to the full, effective and equal participation in political and public affairs. New forms of participation and grass-roots engagement, in particular through the use of information and communication technology and social media that have emerged over recent years will be explored , with a view to assess the extent to which they can facilitate the exercise of the right to participate in public affairs. This session will also provide a forum to discuss other new forms of participation, including alternative ways of voting and polling, participatory budgeting, special measures to guarantee equal access to public service, etc., and assess their contribution to the implementation of the right to participate in public affairs.

## **Outcome**

9. OHCHR will prepare and publish a summary report on the expert workshop, including any recommendations stemming therefrom, as requested by Human Rights Council Resolution 30/9 in operative paragraph 8(c). The summary report will be submitted to the thirty-third session of the Human Rights Council.

### ***Background documents:***

- [Human Rights Council resolution 30/9](#) "Equal participation in political and public affairs"
- [OHCHR report A/HRC/30/26](#) "Study on best practices, experiences and challenges and ways to overcome them with regard to the promotion, protection and implementation of the right to participate in public affairs in the context of the existing human rights law"
- [OHCHR report A/HRC/27/29](#) "Report on factors that impede equal political participation and steps to overcome those challenges"