

**Expert consultations with United Nations Independent Expert on the promotion of a democratic and equitable international order on the issue of public participation and decision-making in global governance spaces**

**Wednesday 22 May 2019, Palais Wilson, Geneva**

**Wednesday 29 May 2019, United Nations Information Center, Washington DC**

**Background**

In his vision-setting report to the Human Rights Council in September 2018 (A/HRC/39/47), the new Independent expert (IE) on the promotion of a democratic and equitable international order identified six thematic priorities he would be focusing on over the course of his tenure. Two of these priorities deal with public participation and decision-making in multilateral institutions, and the emergence of global governance forums. The IE has decided to devote his 2019 HRC and GA reports to the intersectional topic of public participation and decision-making in global governance spaces and its impact on a democratic and equitable international order.

The IE reiterates that public participation is a core value and a key element in the realization of a democratic and equitable international order. Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights recognize the right and opportunity of everyone to take part in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives. The right to participate in decision-making is not restricted to local affairs, but extends to global institutions where the right to be heard should be upheld. General Comment 25 of the Human Rights Committee on participation in public affairs and the right to vote recognized that the right to take part in the conduct of public affairs “cover[ed]... the formulation and implementation of policy at international, national and local levels” (para. 5). Importantly, individuals – in their own capacity or collectively through organized or non-organized groups – should be able to participate beyond national boundaries as major public decisions impacting on the enjoyment of their fundamental rights and freedoms have been increasingly taken beyond the nation State.

In fact, intergovernmental groupings besides the United Nations have emerged where international priorities are set. These intergovernmental, multisectoral and private groupings, such as the Group of Seven (G7), the Group of 20 (G20), the group of Brazil, Russian Federation, India, People’s Republic of China and South Africa (BRICS), the Group of 77 (G77, including the Group of 24 on International Monetary Affairs and Development), the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), the World Economic Forum (WEF), and the Bilderberg Meeting (BM), play a role in developing the framework and function of the international order. Their meetings and policies invite intense public scrutiny and even protests, demonstrating the scope of their influence on global governance and the unique positions they occupy as convenors of the world’s leaders and global thinkers. Moreover, these intergovernmental groupings will have added importance in the coming years given the increasingly cross-border nature of the world’s political and economic challenges.

However, these groupings remain largely inaccessible, hence contributing to the democratic deficit in the global decision-making process. As global governance forums, and as much as traditional multilateral institutions such as the United Nations, the World Bank (WB), the

International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Trade Organization, they have an obligation to make decisions in accordance with such basic principles of democratic governance as transparency, inclusivity, responsiveness and accountability. Participation in decision-making requires that all stakeholders have the opportunity to influence and share control over development initiatives and the decisions and resources that affect their lives.

This is all the more important in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which has been endorsed by all UN Member States. Goal 16 seeks to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. This Goal includes ensuring responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels (target 17.7). The IE is of the opinion that this Goal should also apply to global governance spaces as these are prominently state-centred.

## **Objective**

For the purpose of his reports, the IE is interested in looking at participation and decision-making in international institutions in as far as their financial and economic policies impact on a democratic and equitable international order; besides the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), specifically how can such groupings become more accessible, inclusive and responsive to the voices of people and groups previously excluded from international decision-making bodies, but whose lives and livelihoods are affected by the decisions taken. As such, it would be worthwhile to study their structural design, policy and decision-making processes and practices, applying the principles of transparency, participation and accountability in order to develop recommendations on strengthening their accessibility, inclusivity and human rights impact.

In his assessment, he will be guided, inter alia, by the guidelines on the effective implementation of the right to participate in public affairs presented by the Human Rights Council to Member States in September 2018 (see Council resolution 39/11).

The IE is aware of efforts by a number of traditional multilateral institutions of economic, financial and political nature at the international and regional levels, such as the WB, IMF, and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) to engage with civil society to achieve legitimacy and increase development effectiveness. In this regard, he will seek to identify good practices to emulate.

The IE will pay particular attention to those belonging to underrepresented parts of society, including women, children, youth, older persons, persons with disabilities, persons belonging to ethnic, religious, national, linguistic and racial minorities, migrants, refugees, and others, and also including indigenous peoples and others not associated with or organized in non-governmental organizations (as listed by the Human Rights Council in its resolution (A/HRC/RES/38/12, OP4). He deems important to add to the list victims of discrimination and marginalization because of their sexual orientation and gender identity who too have faced significant hurdles in that regard, as well as social movements, and activists working on economic and social rights.

## Agenda

14:00-14:10	Welcome, introduction and opening remarks by the Independent Expert
14:10-15:40	<p>Discuss the experience of participants or their partners in exercising, or seeking to exercise, their right to participate in public affairs in one or several of the following global governance groupings/spaces: G7, G20, G77/G24, NAM, BRICS, WEF and BM in terms of:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Access;</li> <li>b) Inclusivity; and</li> <li>c) Influencing the decision-making process.</li> </ol> <p>Any other economic or financial groupings/spaces to be added in your opinion?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What were the main structural and/or practical obstacles?</li> <li>2. Which improvements do you see as key to secure genuine and meaningful participation in decision-making processes of the aforementioned groupings/spaces?</li> <li>3. Good practices from WB, IMF and OECD in this field?</li> </ol> <p><i>Participants' recommendations</i></p>
15:40-16:00	Coffee break
16:00 – 16:45	<p>Discuss the experience of participants or their partners in exercising, or seeking to exercise, their rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association in the holding of meetings of one or several of the aforementioned groupings/spaces and in the margins thereof.</p> <p>Discuss cases of reprisal that might have occurred when participating, or seeking to participate, in a meeting or activity of one or several of the aforementioned groupings/spaces.</p> <p><i>Participants' recommendations</i></p>
16:45 – 17:45	<p>Discuss the overall impact of the economic and financial policies of the aforementioned groupings/spaces on a democratic and equitable international order.</p> <p>More broadly, discuss in what way(s) a lack of genuine and meaningful participation and lack of influencing of decision-making process by the public in global governance grouping/spaces in general hamper the realization of a democratic and equitable international order.</p> <p><i>Participants' recommendations</i></p>
17:45 – 18:00	Conclusion