

[UN takes forward step on LGBT rights and backward step on sexual and reproductive rights](#)

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(New York) - In a significant move, the UN Committee on Non-Governmental Organisations, which acts as the gatekeeper to NGO access to the UN, has accredited an organisation working on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender rights.

In a backward step, however, the same committee denied access to a youth group working to advance sexual and reproductive rights.

'The decision by the Committee on Non-Governmental Organisations to recommend consultative status to [ARC International](#), a leading NGO working to advance LGBT rights and equality, is a triumph in the ongoing struggle to provide access to the UN for LGBT persons and advocates,' said Michelle Evans of the International Service for Human Rights.

'By contrast, the Committee's decision to block the [Youth Coalition for Sexual and Reproductive Rights](#), a youth-led organisation working to promote and protect the sexual and reproductive rights of young people, is both disappointing and incompatible with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the international Declaration on Human Rights Defenders,' Ms Evans said.

'Young human rights defenders are entitled to have their voices heard in international negotiations and discussions, including in decisions that affect their bodies and lives,' said Ms Evans.

'The Committee is obstructing this organisation on grounds not linked to the criteria for NGO accreditation described in UN ECOSOC Resolution 1996/31, the legal framework for the work of the Committee,' Ms Evans said.

Consultative status provides non-governmental organisations the opportunity to participate formally in UN meetings, including speaking on the record publicly at UN meetings, and organising events on UN grounds.

'Unfortunately, the outcome on the application of YCSSR is not unusual; it represents one of many times the Committee has blocked applications of NGOs that work on human rights,' Ms Evans said.

The application of ARC International was successful in a 7-6 vote. Of the 19 member Committee, several States attempted to block the application - including China, Morocco, Mozambique, the Russian Federation, Senegal and Sudan - but were outnumbered by supporters of ARC International, including Belgium, Bulgaria, Israel, Peru, Turkey, the US and Venezuela. Other Committee members either abstained (India) or were absent

(Burundi, Cuba, Kyrgyzstan, Nicaragua, Pakistan).

The YCSRR application failed as a result of a tied vote of 6-6, which meant the application was again deferred. Belgium, Bulgaria, India, Israel, Peru, Turkey and the US supported the application, while China, Morocco, Nicaragua, Pakistan, Russia, Senegal and Sudan voted against. Burundi, Cuba, Mozambique and Venezuela were absent, while Kyrgyzstan abstained.

The positive result for ARC International reflects that the Committee has heard the repeated messages sent by the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)--the body that oversees the Committee's work--that it must stop blocking LGBT groups from participating in the UN.

'In previous years, ECOSOC has overturned numerous negative recommendations from the Committee on LGBT groups from various regions. It is time for the ECOSOC to send the same message to the Committee concerning human rights groups, including those working on sexual and reproductive rights: that it must not shut out from the UN credible NGOs that do important and valuable work,' said Ms Evans.

'We expect the ECOSOC to finally grant consultative status to YCSRR in its session in July. With consultative status, this group can better serve their community by sharing information and analysis of the abuses and discrimination faced around the world, and by advocating for their rights in UN spaces,' Ms Evans said.

Background

(Updated - 30 June 2014) The Committee on NGOs is tasked with considering the applications of NGOs for consultative status with the UN as well as the quadrennial reports submitted by NGOs already in consultative status. Consultative status provides NGOs with access to a range of fora at the UN, including the Human Rights Council, ECOSOC and its subsidiary bodies, UN conferences, and special events organized by the President of the General Assembly. The Committee makes recommendations to the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), which can either approve or overturn a decision.[\[1\]](#)

At the recent resumed session in New York, from 19 to 28 May and 6 June 2014, the Committee approved 158 NGOs for consultative status to the UN, but deferred a further 182 applications under review to the next session held in January 2015. While the rate of approval for new applications was higher than ever before with 67% receiving a recommendation for consultative status, the Committee regrettably recommended status for a mere 30% of those NGOs whose applications had been deferred from previous sessions.

Of these repeatedly deferred applications, a majority are NGOs that work on sexual orientation and gender identity issues, women's rights, reproductive and sexual rights, minority rights, caste, and human rights more generally. Belgium's delegate noted in his closing remarks that "many human rights organizations, especially those that work on sexual and reproductive rights, gender equality, minority rights and women's rights, have once again been blocked unrelated to the criteria of NGO accreditation outlined in UN Resolution 1996/31."

It is widely accepted that State membership of the Committee lies at the root of this problem, and with a number of repressive States set to take seats on the Committee beginning next session, NGOs will face an even more difficult process of achieving consultative status. Azerbaijan, Iran and Mauritania are a few of the repressive regimes that will start their four-year terms in January 2015.[\[2\]](#)

Some of the organizations whose applications were once again blocked by the Committee (in addition to the Youth Coalition) were: Collectif des Families de Disparu(e) en Algerie (CFDA),[\[3\]](#) the Global Network for Rights and Development (GNRD),[\[4\]](#) the Geneva Institute for Human Rights (GIHR),[\[5\]](#) International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN),[\[6\]](#) Iran Human Rights Documentation Center (IHRDC),[\[7\]](#) Institute for Human Rights and Business Limited,[\[8\]](#) Asia Center for Human Rights (ACHR),[\[9\]](#) Freedom Now,[\[10\]](#) the Child Rights Information Network (CRIN),[\[11\]](#) and the Bureau International Pour le Respect des Droits de l'homme au Sahara Occidental.[\[12\]](#)

In more positive developments, the Committee recommended consultative status for a few NGOs that

have been deferred from previous sessions, including: the International Federation of Liberal Youth,[13] Grupo de Mujeres de la Argentina- Foro de VIH, Mujeres y Familia,[14] The Generation Initiative for Women and Youth Network,[15] and International Partnership for Human Rights (IPHR).[16]

The next regular session of the Committee on NGOs will be held in New York City from 26 January to 3 February and 12 February 2015.

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[1] ECOSOC (54 States) meets annually in July, alternatively in Geneva or New York. In 2014, ECOSOC will meet in New York.

[2] <http://www.ishr.ch/news/civil-society-loses-repressive-states-win-election-regulate-ngo-access-un>

[3] CFDA is a France-based NGO whose principal aim is to locate victims of forced disappearances and to shed light on all victims of forced disappearances in Algeria. CFDA has received 78 questions since its application for status in May 2008.

[4] GNRD is a Geneva-based human rights organisation, focusing on the protection and recognition of society's most vulnerable, including women and children. Since 2011, it has received 30 questions.

[5] The GIHR is a Geneva based non-governmental organization geared to train Arabs in the field of human rights and the laws as well as mechanisms of human rights. It has received 22 questions since its application in 2011.

[6] IDSN is an NGO based in Denmark aiming to contribute to the elimination of caste-based discrimination worldwide. Since its application for consultative status in 2007, IDSN has received 62 questions.

[7] IHRDC is a US-based NGO focusing on the human rights situation in Iran. Since 2010, it has received 38 questions.

[8] The Institute for Human Rights and Business Limited is a UK-based NGO that seeks to raise corporate standards and strengthen public policy to ensure that the activities of companies do not contribute to human rights abuses. Since its application in May 2011, the Institute has received 10 questions.

[9] ACHR, an NGO based in South Korea, campaigns for the establishment of a human rights protection mechanism in Asia. Since its application in 2008, ACHR has received 36 questions.

[10] Freedom Now is an NGO based in the US aiming to free prisoners of conscience through legal, political and public relations advocacy efforts. Since its application for consultative status in 2009, it has received 63 questions.

[11] CRIN, a British NGO, uses the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child as a basis for advocacy at the international level. Since its initial application in September 2010, CRIN has received 15 questions.

[12] Bureau International Pour le Respect des Droits de l'homme au Sahara Occidental is a Swiss NGO aiming to bring to the attention of UN mechanisms of human rights violations in Western Sahara as well as campaign for missing persons and prisoners of conscience. It has received 49 questions since its initial application in 2010.

[13] IFLY is a Belgium-based umbrella organization for liberal and student youth organizations oriented towards the promotion of active citizenship, respect for human rights and the rule of law. Between its application in 2006 and recommendation for status by the Committee, the IFLY received 43 questions.

[14] Grupo de Mujeres de la Argentina- Foro de VIH, [Mujeres y Familia is an Argentina-based NGO that unites organizations that work to combat injustice and to improve the welfare of vulnerable communities within the penal system by giving a voice to those LGBT individuals who have been historically marginalized. It first applied for consultative status in May 2012.

[15] The Generation Initiative is a Nigeria-based NGO working to realize the full sexual and reproductive health and rights of all people. It first applied for consultative status in April 2013.

[16] IPHR is a Brussels-based NGO committed to promoting human rights through monitoring, reporting, capacity-building and advocacy at the international level. Since its application for consultative status in May 2010, IPHR has received 16 questions.