

[NGO Committee | Stand for election to stamp out reprisals](#)

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- ANDREW GILMOUR - ASSISTANT SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Update 16 April: At the ECOSOC elections held today for the NGO Committee 2019-2022 term, only two regions ran competitive slates- the Latin American and Caribbean region (GRULAC) and the Asia-Pacific region. In GRULAC the new members are Brazil, Cuba, Mexico and Nicaragua. Venezuela was voted off. Uruguay stepped down. For Asia Pacific the new members are Bahrain, China, India and Pakistan. Iran was voted off. Africa: Burundi, Libya, Nigeria, Sudan and Swaziland; Eastern Europe: Estonia and Russia; WEOG: Greece, Israel, Turkey and the USA.

Where the NGO Committee should be providing a gateway into the UN for NGOs working in line with the UN Charter, too often Committee members block entry for NGOs and malign or harass them. Preventing individuals from cooperating or seeking to cooperate with the UN is unjustified. The UN and Member States are legally obliged to prevent and counter such practice.

At a press briefing organised by ISHR, Human Rights Watch and the Committee to Protect Journalists to highlight concerns about the practice of the Committee, Andrew Gilmour, the UN Assistant Secretary General on Human Rights and the lead on UN efforts to put an end to intimidation and reprisals against those cooperating with the UN on human rights, stated,

‘The NGO Committee (..) and its accreditation process have sometimes been linked to the issue of reprisals. Indeed, this has been mentioned in successive annual reports of the Secretary-General in this context.’

‘Some Member States have attempted to block the accreditation of NGOs, especially human rights NGOs, through legal, political and procedural maneuvers in an attempt to silence critics,’ he added.

Through such practices, NGOs can find their applications deferred by the Committee for years. The International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN) has had their application for accreditation deferred for over 10 years.

Such practice has been repeatedly criticised by some States, including Chile and Mexico. These and other ECOSOC members have repeatedly called for urgent improvements in Committee practice, as shown in the below video:

In addition, on more than one occasion, the Committee has allowed the suggestion that an NGO has terrorist sympathies or affiliations to inform a decision to close an application or withdraw accreditation. Despite the gravity of such accusations, these NGOs were not informed of the decisions taken nor provided an opportunity to defend themselves.

'Denying an NGO the right to contest an accusation of terrorist connections, is simply unconscionable. The potential effect of such an accusation on an NGO is not difficult to imagine', said ISHR's Eleanor Openshaw.

Reprisals at the hands of members of the NGO Committee are not the sole instance of such practice. As Gilmour noted, instances of intimidation and reprisals against those cooperating or seeking to cooperate with the UN are increasing. He ended his intervention at the press briefing by stating,

'The UN is an intergovernmental body, of course, but "we the peoples" - the first three words of the UN Charter - was not just a rhetorical flourish, or a joke. We mean it, which is why we feel strongly that UN processes should not serve to undermine the important work of civil society.'

Gilmour outlined steps his office would be taking in regard to alleged reprisals at the hands of the Committee.

'We will continue to address individual cases as they come up, in the context of the NGO Committee's work, and I look forward to engaging constructively with the membership of the Committee and its distinguished chairperson to address these concerns,' he noted.

The ECOSOC elections to the NGO Committee - for which any UN Member State can stand - will be held on 16 April. Several NGOs have [called on](#) States committed to NGO access to and participation in UN processes, to stand as candidates. ISHR raised these calls in [a statement delivered at the the 37th session of the Human Rights Council](#).

'Standing for the elections and voting with integrity are means for States to put into practice a commitment to eradicate reprisals and - more generally- to promote the rights of civil society to engage with UN bodies and processes,' said Openshaw.

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See footage of the full ISHR / HRW / CPJ press conference of 16 March [here](#)

For more on the NGO Committee, see ISHR video ['The Anti-NGO Committee'](#)