

Human Rights Council 34th session

Speaker: Michael Ineichen - Check against delivery

ITEM 8 – VDPA & FOLLOW-UP

Mr President,

The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action recognises ‘the important role of NGOs in the promotion of all human rights and in humanitarian activities’ at all levels. It emphasises the need for ‘continued dialogue and cooperation between Governments and NGOs’. Opportunity for such cooperation within the UN is heavily reliant on the decisions of the ECOSOC NGO Committee - the effective gateway for NGOs into the UN.

ISHR is able to make this statement to the Human Rights Council – to engage in dialogue with states – on the back of an accreditation recommended by the Committee, 30 years ago.

However, on the basis of current Committee practice, and if we were applying today, ISHR would likely face many obstacles.

Repetitive questioning and multiple deferrals of applications leave many NGOs blocked from participation in UN processes. Human rights organisations face a 50% greater likelihood of being denied accreditation than others.

At its latest session in January, the Committee recommended the withdrawal of accreditation from a number of organisations based in Turkey or until recently working in Turkey. These recommendations were made on improper grounds and without due process. The Committee decision in these cases risks setting a terrible precedent. It also suggests Committee practice is getting worse, with the Committee routinely violating the rights to freedom of expression and association in a manner that is incompatible with the VDPA, the UDHR and the UN Charter itself.

The deeply troubling practice of the NGO Committee is directly pertinent to the Human Rights Council, as only NGOs accredited by the Committee can access and participate in this place. The Committee practice of arbitrarily blocking NGOs denies the Council the opportunity to hear their views. Council members and observer states should call on ECOSOC to reform the Committee, so that it properly fulfils its mandate compatibly with international human rights law.

Thank you.