

22 April 2013

Excellency,

Re: language on NGO participation in resolution on the High-level Meeting of the General Assembly on the Appraisal of the Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons

The 23 undersigned nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are writing to express our concern regarding the language on NGO participation in the draft resolution on **the Modalities, format, and organisation of the High-level Meeting of the General Assembly on the Appraisal of the Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons**, to be adopted by the General Assembly in the coming weeks.

We are concerned that the resolution as drafted limits the participation of non-governmental organizations to those to whose participation no State objects. Such language is open to the politically motivated exclusion of NGOs and undue censorship of these legitimate stakeholders.

The 'no-objection' procedure for NGO participation, whereby NGOs can be barred from participating if a single State objects, is severely flawed. The arbitrary and ad-hoc nature of the procedure poses a severe obstacle to the effective participation of NGOs, and undermines the planning of meaningful NGO contributions. By its very nature, the procedure risks excluding relevant voices in each of the fora it is applied, and we therefore object to its application.

Notwithstanding our fundamental objection to the procedure, another concerning aspect of its inclusion in the resolution is that States can object to an NGO, without giving the rejected organisation a reason for the objection or a chance to contest the decision. Despite rhetoric supporting the vital role that civil society plays within the UN, this procedure flouts basic principles of accountability and due process.

This practice has serious implications for the participation of NGOs in spaces that would otherwise benefit greatly from their contributions, vital information and expertise. NGO participation allows for dialogue between NGOs and governments, and constructive engagement on what the UN can do to address the relevant issues. It is important that processes such as the High-level Meeting on the Appraisal of the Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons continue to hear a variety of voices.

For these reasons we strongly believe that it is essential for Member States to provide for the meaningful participation of NGOs in this and similar processes. We urge your delegation to act to protect the spaces for independent civil society to engage openly and without restrictions in the High-level Meeting on the Appraisal of the Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking and other UN fora.

We urge you to reject language in the draft resolution that would directly or indirectly curtail the regular and predictable participation of NGOs in the High-level meeting, and ensure that any procedure used to manage the participation of diverse stakeholders is in keeping with the principles of accountability, transparency and due process.

Sincerely,

- Action Canada for Population and Development (ACPD)
- Alkarama
- American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)
- Amnesty International
- Association for the Prevention of Torture (APT)
- Cairo Institute of Human Rights Studies (CIHRS)
- Center for Legal and Social Studies (CELS)
- Centre for Civil and Political Rights (CCPR Centre)
- Coalition of African Lesbians (CAL)
- Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women (International Secretariat)
- Human Rights Now
- International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN)
- International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)
- International Movement Against All Forms of Discrimination and Racism (IMADR)
- International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT)
- International Service for Human Rights (ISHR)
- International Women's Rights Action Watch (IWRAP)
- International Women's Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific (IWRAP Asia Pacific)
- Ipas
- Red Latinoamericana y Caribeña por la defensa de los derechos de los niños, niñas y adolescentes (REDLAMYC)
- Sexual Minorities Uganda (SMUG)
- The NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child (The NGO Group for the CRC)
- World Federalist Movement–Institute for Global Policy (WFM-IGP)