

## **Item 8: Follow-up and implementation of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action**

**Delivered by: Salma El Hosseiny**

Thank you Mr. President,

Effective implementation of the Vienna Declaration requires the involvement of civil society, including at the UN. Civil society access and participation at the UN is a right and its value has been acknowledged repeatedly including by members of this Council.

To get in the door – for me to make this statement – relies on having ECOSOC accreditation. However, ECOSOC accreditation is in the hands of the Committee on NGOs. The 19- member Committee is dominated by States with poor records on enabling the work of a diverse, pluralistic and independent civil society. Through perpetual questioning by Committee members, human rights NGOs (in particular) are kept out. Further, NGOs are maligned– including by accusations of terrorist sympathies – without a guaranteed right to defend themselves.

On 16 April, ECOSOC will elect Committee members for 2019 -2022. This is the moment the practice of the Committee could be transformed.

We call on States with positive records on defending the rights of civil society to stand as candidates. This is a key moment to signal your active commitment to defending civil society.

We call on ECOSOC members to elect only States with such a positive record. HRC resolutions on civil society space provide guidance as to the standards members of the Committee should meet.

Membership of the Committee matters. It matters to every civil society representative in this room. It should matter to every State representative interested in civil society participation with this Council.

Thank you Mr. President.