

NGO General Statement: Committee on NGOs resumed session, May 2017

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Thank you Mr. Chair.

I welcome this opportunity to address the Committee on NGOs.

I am particularly pleased to be speaking on the first day that an open session of the Committee on NGOs is being webcast. We very much welcome the decision by ECOSOC to make these sessions more accessible to civil society representatives around the world.

The Committee on NGOs plays a hugely important role in recommending accreditation to NGOs. This is critical to enabling NGO participation at the UN. NGO participation has long been recognized as key to contributing to efforts to fulfil the purposes of the UN Charter.

We know that the Committee on NGOs has been criticized a lot— by States, UN officials and NGOs - for failing to fulfil its mandate in good faith. Last June, 230 NGOs expressed grave concern at several Committee practices including repeated questioning of applicants and multiple deferrals of applications, for no good reason. To counter these, increased transparency and accountability of Committee practices and greater accessibility to Committee processes are essential.

That is why webcasting these sessions is a great start. I want to acknowledge the leadership of Chile, Mexico and Uruguay for supporting this measure and to all ECOSOC members that voted in favour of it. We appreciate that, whilst some members of ECOSOC – also represented here in the Committee – expressed concerns over ECOSOC taking action, no State objected to enabling NGOs from being able to follow consideration of their applications in the Committee. Clearly access to UN spaces should not be limited to those who have resources to travel to New York or Geneva or other major UN hubs. We welcome the fact that States agreed that accessibility to UN open processes was an important guiding principle to consider in defining working methods.

Of course, improving the working methods of the Committee on NGOs cannot stop with webcasting its open sessions. To ensure that the Committee fulfils its mandate fully, fairly and effectively, further steps for reform are needed. Where the Committee is unable to make such decisions, it is correct that ECOSOC – as the parent body – takes responsibility for effecting needed change.

Safeguarding civil society space at the UN is a critical component in the struggle to protect civil society space globally and to providing a voice to the voiceless. We call on all States with a commitment to defending the work of civil society to consider putting themselves forward as candidates of the Committee on NGOs. The fight to defend civil society space at the UN starts here at this very Committee.