

## **ISHR handbook on UN accreditation launches in New York**

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The launch event, hosted by the Permanent Missions of Australia and Chile and the International Service for Human Rights (ISHR) and held on 28 May, focused on the strengthening of NGO participation and the right to freedom of association at the United Nations.

Panelists spoke about the challenges that civil society organisations face while seeking accreditation, especially those NGOs that work on issues of sexual orientation, women's rights, reproductive rights, minority issues, caste and freedom of expression and association.

Ambassador Gillian Bird, Permanent Representative of Australia to the United Nations, called on States to 'work to facilitate an accreditation process that is fair, transparent, expeditious and non-discriminatory.' She said the ISHR handbook is of great value to those seeking UN accreditation because of the political and opaque nature of the workings of the Committee.

During his opening remarks, Andre-Michel Essoungou, OHCHR New York's Public Information Officer, stated that it is through the exercise of the freedom of expression and the freedom of peaceful assembly, 'that we make informed, considered and intelligent decisions about our own development. To restrict these rights and freedoms undermines progress.'

Ambassador Cristán Barros, Permanent Representative of Chile to the United Nations, emphasised the obligation that Member States have to ensure the conformity of the application of the purposes and principles of the UN Charter. He called the new publication 'a concrete guide to help bring more civil society organisations to the UN.'

Michelle Evans, ISHR's New York Manager and Advocacy Coordinator, said the NGO Committee is one of the least transparent and accountable bodies in the UN. 'The aim of the ISHR publication is to bring to light the nature of the Committee's work in hopes of changing it, and to equip NGOs seeking UN accreditation with better knowledge as they enter what can be an extremely drawn-out, unfair and difficult process.'

Following these remarks, Rikke Nöhrind, the Executive Director of the International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN), spoke of IDSN's experience with the Committee on NGOs, including being asked over 65 questions by the Indian delegation. She also spoke of the value of consultative status to NGOs and the importance of being able to formally participate. Ms. Nöhrind noted that the Special Rapporteur on the exercise of the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association criticised India for arbitrarily blocking IDSN from obtaining UN consultative status, calling it 'clearly unacceptable, wrong and unfair.'

Jessica Stern, the Executive Director of the International Lesbian and Gay Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC), recalled that only 13 organisations focused on LGBT rights have ECOSOC accreditation and urged States to 'democratise UN access for all.'

During the closing remarks, given by Ambassador Bird, there was an emphasis on the role of States in ensuring that the UN accreditation process does not discriminate against NGOs working on important human rights issues.

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