

Success for two NGOs at ECOSOC but systemic reform still urgently needed

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The latest examples of NGOs having to wait years to gain access to the UN, once again highlight the urgent need to reform the dysfunctional 'gatekeeper' committee that controls the accreditation process.



(New York) Two human rights organisations have finally been granted access to the UN through a decision of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) to accredit them. Years of questioning, deferrals and votes against granting them consultative status by ECOSOC's Committee on NGOs, have finally been reversed.

Whilst the outcome on these individual cases is cause for celebration, ECOSOC has again failed to substantially address the problem at the root of the NGOs' experience: the practice of the NGO Committee and the need for its reform.

ECOSOC granted consultative status to the [Committee for the Protection of Journalists](#) (CPJ) and the [Youth Coalition for Sexual and Reproductive Rights](#) (YCSRR), two organisations that have spent years having their applications for consultative status considered by the NGO Committee. The US and Australia brought resolutions to the 54 member UN body to overturn the decisions taken against the NGOs in June by the Committee on NGOs, a subsidiary body of ECOSOC.

Speaking to the long delay YCSRR experienced in getting accreditation, several States acknowledged that there were differences of opinion on issues such as sexual and reproductive rights. However, as the UK emphasized, 'prejudice' couldn't inform decisions regarding accreditation. Other States spoke of the importance of the UN as a space for voicing diverse opinion. 'Giving up on listening to divergent views' is tantamount 'to giving up on the principles the UN is founded on', said the Czech Republic. Canada echoed that view noting, 'we can't allow divergent points of view to be silenced' by States.

'NGOs should not be seen as a threat to states but rather seen as a support to the healthy functioning of the system', noted the UK in name of several States, emphasizing the importance of civil society participation in the UN.

China and Russia called for votes on both cases, noting that the move to bring the cases to ECOSOC was 'confrontational', and arguing that ECOSOC should accept the recommendations from the Committee.

'Both NGOs finally got backing from ECOSOC. However, three candidates running for a seat on the Human Rights Council for 2017 - China, Russia and first timer Rwanda - all voted against granting accreditation to an organization that protects journalists, CPJ. This is a chilling,' said ISHR's Eleanor Openshaw. 'Guatemala, who is also a candidate for the HRC in 2017, voted against accreditation for YCSRR. We hope that States will bear this record in mind when voting for HRC members in November.'

Following the result, CPJ noted that accreditation would allow them to access UN bodies and processes, such as the Human Rights Council and 'deliver a counter-narrative to States.'

The NGO Committee has come in for a raft of criticism over the years, with an unprecedented level of attention at the last session when votes were taken against the two NGOs. At ECOSOC such criticism continued, with the US Ambassador Power noting that the NGO Committee was 'looking more and more like an anti NGO Committee'. Chile, Mexico and Uruguay, in their now traditional statement at ECOSOC, spoke of 'serious distortion of procedure and goals' by the NGO Committee.

Whilst several States called for greater transparency of the work of the NGO Committee through webcasting, no specific steps to achieve this were outlined.

Reflecting on the outcome of the ECOSOC meeting, ISHR's Eleanor Openshaw said it again highlighted the

urgent need for reform.

'It is encouraging that States are so vocal about the need to reform the practice of the NGO Committee. Now we need to understand precisely how and when they will make that happen,' said Ms Openshaw.

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Vote records:

Committee Protection of Journalists: 40 – 5 (abstentions 6)

For: Afghanistan, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Chile, Congo, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, Iraq, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Lebanon, Mauritania, Moldova, Nigeria, Pakistan, Panama, Peru, Portugal, Serbia, South Africa, South Korea, Sweden, Switzerland, Togo, Trinidad and Tobago, UK, USA

Against: China, Russia, Rwanda, Vietnam, Zimbabwe

Abstain: Algeria, Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, India, Uganda,

(Absent: Botswana, DRC, Somalia)

Youth Coalition for Sexual and Reproductive Rights: 26-7 (abstentions 13)

For: Antigua- Barbuda, Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Chile, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Honduras, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Peru, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Serbia, South Africa, Sweden, Switzerland, UK, USA.

Against: China, Guatemala, Nigeria, Pakistan, Russia, Uganda, Zimbabwe

Abstain: Algeria, Bangladesh, Guyana, India, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Lebanon, Mauritania, Panama, Rwanda, Togo, Trinidad and Tobago, Vietnam

(Absent: Afghanistan, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Congo, DRC, Ghana, Republic of Moldova, Somalia)

Photo source: [Youth Coalition for Sexual and Reproductive Rights](#)