

Ignoring precedent the NGO Committee denies NGO right to speak

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The NGO Committee is back in business. On the first day of its new session it failed to allow an NGO to make a general statement, despite the fact that a precedent for such an intervention was set at its last session in June.



The NGO Committee, which sits under the UN's Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and recommends consultative status for NGOs – the effective gateway for NGOs into the UN – spent an hour discussing whether an NGO could deliver a three minute statement.

The US, Mexico, the EU delegation, and Greece intervened in favour of the delivery of the statement. While China, Russia and India opposed the idea. China commented that 'the NGO Committee didn't have time to listen to statements from NGOs'. In response the US noted that the NGO Committee – the body that opens the door to NGOs at the UN – should not be the body that is unwilling to hear from NGOs.

Despite the Secretariat confirming that there was no procedural objection to an NGO making a statement – that the rules of procedure did not prohibit an NGO from speaking – no consensus could be found.

ISHR's Tess McEvoy said that the lack of consensus amongst Committee members was a frustrating and dispiriting development.

'A Brazilian NGO, Conectas, had travelled to New York to speak to the importance of NGO participation in the UN – not least in regard to the implementation of Agenda 2030 – and of the need for reforms to facilitate participation of Global South NGOs,' said Ms McEvoy, 'It is a shame this important statement was not heard by the Committee.'

The first general statement by an NGO at the NGO Committee was made at the last session in June 2016. In that statement, ISHR spoke to the content of a joint letter signed by 230 NGOs expressing concern at the functioning of the NGO Committee and proposing a series of reforms to ensure fair, transparent and consistent practice.

The fate of three Turkish NGOs was also decided today. The NGO Committee voted to recommend the withdrawal of UN accreditation from three NGOs that had been closed during the state of emergency in Turkey in July 2016. Ahead of the vote, the Committee discussed whether it should inform the organisations prior to recommending the withdrawal of status to ECOSOC. This was rejected.