

General Assembly | NGOs raise alarm about negative impacts on human rights of UN budget negotiations

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NGOs [sent an urgent letter](#) to diplomatic delegations today, citing a number of worrying proposals under consideration by the General Assembly's Fifth Committee, which is under pressure to finalise the UN budget by Christmas Eve.

'We are extremely alarmed by a number of aggressive proposals by the likes of China and Russia that would undermine the quality of the work and the effectiveness of critical human rights mechanisms,' said Madeleine Sinclair, ISHR's New York Office Director and Legal Counsel.

Several proposals seem to take aim at the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, including dramatically increasing scrutiny of the use of so-called extrabudgetary resources, or voluntary contributions from countries, which are a significant source of funds for the Office (around 59% of its income last year). 'Some of these proposals can look rather innocuous at first but the reality is this would severely impact the Office's ability to carry out its work to promote and protect human rights around the world', said Sinclair.

Other negative proposals NGOs are urging States to reject include arbitrarily cutting the travel budget for treaty body members and denying funding to webcast the meetings of the treaty bodies. Treaty bodies are the independent expert bodies set up to monitor States' implementation of their obligations under human rights treaties.

'Equally concerning are proposals that would threaten civil society's ability to engage with, participate in, and have information about, key UN proceedings,' said Sinclair. China and the Group of 77 (a coalition of 135 developing nations) have proposed cutting funds for a staff person to support civil society engagement, and imposing greater limitations on access to the UN in Geneva. 'Basically, China is chipping away wherever it can—in this case using the UN budget to undermine civil society's ability to access and engage with these bodies and mechanisms', said Sinclair.

Finally, the NGO letter points to a number of proposals seemingly designed to radically limit or eliminate support (funding and staff) for UN mechanisms intended to promote accountability for serious human rights violations in Syria and Myanmar.

The NGOs call on Member States to offer strong support to the proposals that would adequately fund and otherwise ensure the proper functioning of the UN's human rights bodies and mechanisms; to reject those proposals that would undermine their effectiveness; and to resist pressure to accept compromise agreements that would have an overall negative effect on the UN's human rights activities.

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