

UN Committee on NGOs accredits 159 NGOs, defers 180

5 February 2013

[New York] – The UN Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), which concluded its 2013 regular session on 30 January, continues to wrongly delay, deny, and close the applications of credible NGOs whose work addresses significant human rights concerns of relevance to the UN. The Committee approved a mere 134 (60%) new applications¹ and 25 (19%) applications deferred² from previous sessions.

In keeping with previous sessions, some States on the Committee continued to oppose NGOs that hold views they do not agree with, or that have been critical of a government's human rights record. Many of those deferred are organizations that deal with sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI), women's rights, reproductive rights, minority issues, caste, freedom of expression and association, and human rights more generally. States that are not supportive of civil society engagement at the UN use strategies to control the review process and defer applications, such as asking (often repetitive) questions that go beyond the scope of what NGOs are required to submit with their applications.

Some Committee members decried this practice. Belgium noted its “serious concerns about the long list of deferred applications and huge backlog”, “deeply regretting” that once again human rights organizations were blocked by numerous and repetitive questions unrelated to the criteria for consultative status. Bulgaria noted its concern that the applications of the “most knowledgeable and meaningful NGOs have been deferred”, saying that the Committee must be more efficient and ensure equal treatment.

Among many others, the Committee continued to block applications from organizations working on caste issues [International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN)³], minority issues [A.U.A. Americas Chapter⁴], human rights [Scholars at Risk (SAR),⁵ International Federation of Liberal Youth,⁶ Collectif des Familles de Disparu(e)s en Algérie,⁷ Iran Human Rights Documentation Center (IHRDC),⁸ Center for Civil and Political Rights (CCPR)⁹] sexual and reproductive rights [Alliance for Reproductive Health Rights (ARHR),¹⁰ Youth Coalition for Sexual and Reproductive Rights (YCSRR)¹¹], and SOGI issues [Australian Lesbian Medical Association (ALMA)¹², Homosexuelle Initiative Wien (HOSI-Wien)].¹³

On a more positive note, of the applications previously deferred for several sessions that were approved at this session, the following were related to: reproductive rights (Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir-Córdoba¹⁴); women's rights/issues (Ilitha Labantu¹⁵, Deutsches Komitee für UN Women¹⁶); and human rights (WITNESS,¹⁷ Asylum Access,¹⁸ Stichting Justitia et Pax Nederland,¹⁹ European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights (ECCHR)²⁰).

Another welcome development at this session was the successful defence of NGOs' right to address the Committee by the US, Belgium, Israel and Bulgaria. The Committee has a practice whereby NGOs can participate in an interactive dialogue with Committee members, to clarify aspects of their work and answer questions. It came to light at this session that the Secretariat of the Committee had excluded an NGO, the Bureau international pour le respect des droits de l'homme au Sahara Occidental,²¹ from this process at Morocco's request. The NGO was allowed to address the Committee in the end, after Belgium, Israel, the USA and

Bulgaria called for due process and equality of treatment of NGOs, and clarified that the Secretariat has no power to decide which NGOs can speak.

Continued discrimination against NGOs dealing with SOGI

As in previous sessions, some of the more contentious moments concerned the applications of organizations that work on SOGI. In response to continued questioning by Sudan, Pakistan and Russia for the Australian Lesbian Medical Association (ALMA) and Homosexuelle Initiative Wien (HOSI-Wien), Belgium, Bulgaria, Israel and the US spoke out to denounce the obvious discrimination against these organisations. Belgium underlined that these organisations were the victims of unfair treatment, quoting the Secretary General of the UN, Ban Ki-Moon, who said “the UN should lead by example” regarding the elimination of discrimination on the grounds of SOGI. Bulgaria noted that despite “sensitivities and divergent views” on SOGI, that it was not the Committee’s role to discuss substance but to review the applications in line with the criteria for consultative status. These States mentioned that the Committee should be ready to decide on these applications at its next session in May, implying they would force a vote if consensus could not be found. However, it is worth noting that these States made similar statements at the previous session as well. In fact, 2012 marked the first year since 2006 that pro-civil society members did not press the Committee to act by making a motion to recommend status for an NGO dealing with SOGI issues.²²

Committee continues to defer quadrennial reports of human rights organizations

The Committee also continued to exert its pressure on NGOs that already have status by deferring the quadrennial reports of certain organizations. NGOs already in consultative status are required to submit quadrennial reports in order to maintain that status. The Committee deferred 21 of the 22 previously deferred quadrennial reports. Of the 274 new reports before the Committee, only one was deferred—Amnesty International’s. [The EU underlined last year](#) that the ‘systematic deferral of these activity reports is used as a form of reprisal against human rights defenders.’

BACKGROUND

The Committee on NGOs is tasked with considering the applications of NGOs for consultative status with the UN²³ as well as the quadrennial reports submitted by NGOs already in consultative status.

The Committee has come under criticism in recent years for failing in its core task of giving civil society a voice at the UN and deviating from the guiding principles in ESOCOC resolution 1996/31 in its handling of applications for consultative status and review of quadrennial reports. It is widely accepted that membership of the Committee²⁴ lies at the root of these negative trends and the balance of the Committee’s membership tends towards States that do not support a vibrant civil society at the UN.²⁵

In this sense, such action by the Committee is a form of reprisals against human rights defenders. By using these tactics, some NGOs waiting for accreditation have had their applications deferred for up to 10 years.²⁶

Targeted NGOs include those dealing with sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI), women’s rights, reproductive rights, minority issues, caste, and freedom of expression and association. They also include national NGOs working on human rights in States that are not supportive of civil society.

[Click here for a detailed overview of the Committee's May 2012 session.](#)

¹ Approval rates for new applications have fluctuated significantly in the last five years: 59% at the 2012 resumed session, 56% at the 2012 regular session, 50% at the 2011 resumed session, 36% at the 2011 regular session, 18% at the 2010 resumed session, 34% at the 2010 regular session, 33% at the 2009 resumed session, 56% at the 2009 regular session, 80% at the 2008 resumed session, and 62% at the 2008 regular session.

² Deferred applications are those that have been reviewed by the Committee at previous sessions but on which the Committee has not come to an agreement.

³ IDSN is an NGO based in Denmark aims to contribute to the elimination of caste-based discrimination worldwide. Since its application for consultative status in 2007, IDSN has received 58 questions.

⁴ AUA Americas Chapter is located in the US. It aims to increase public awareness and understanding of the Assyrian culture and people, to promote human rights and indigenous rights, and to provide charitable services to persons of Assyrian descent. It has received 9 questions since it applied in 2010.

⁵ SAR is an international network of universities and colleges that promotes academic freedom and defends the human rights of scholars and their communities worldwide. SAR has received 51 questions since it applied for status in 2007.

⁶ IFLY is a Belgium-based umbrella organization for liberal and student youth organizations oriented towards the promotion of active citizenship, respect for human rights and the rule of law. Since its application in 2006, the IFLY has received 40 questions.

⁷ CFDA is a France-based NGO whose principal aim is to locate victims of forced disappearances and to shed light on all victims of forced disappearances in Algeria. CFDA has received 72 questions since its application for status in 2008.

⁸ IHRDC is a US-based organization that documents the human rights situation in Iran, and promotes accountability, respect for human rights and the rule of law in Iran. IHRDC applied for status in 2010 and has since been asked 37 questions. IHRDC has also participated in at least two question and answer sessions with the Committee in person.

⁹ The CCPR is an NGO based in Switzerland that works to improve the monitoring of the implementation of the ICCPR by States parties through better interaction between the Human Rights Committee and NGOs. It has received 5 questions since its application in 2011.

¹⁰ ARHR is a Ghanaian NGO that promotes rights-based advocacy to sexual and reproductive health through advocacy and inclusive policy making. It applied for status in 2010 and has received 7 questions since.

¹¹ YCSRR is an international organization based in Canada that Youth Coalition is an international organization of young people committed to promoting adolescent and youth sexual and reproductive rights at the national, regional and international levels. It applied for status in 2010 and has received 18 questions since.

¹² ALMA is an Australian NGO that helps lesbian doctors, lesbian medical students and their partners. ALMA applied for status in 2007 and has since faced 54 questions from the Committee.

¹³ HOSI-Wien is an Austrian NGO that advocates for the human rights of gays and lesbians. Its application dates back to 2007. It has since faced 24 questions.

¹⁴ CDD is an Argentinian NGO that fosters discussion and action on issues such as reproductive rights, sexuality, health and citizenship of women, and their relations with religious elements. It received 25 questions between applying for status in 2009 and being recommended for status in 2013.

¹⁵ Ilitha Labantu is an NGO based in South Africa that works on violence against women. It received 5 questions between its application in 2011 and being recommended for status in 2013.

¹⁶ Deutsches Komitee für UN Women is an NGO based in Germany that works on gender equality and the empowerment of women. It received 2 questions between applying in 2011 and being recommended for status in 2013.

¹⁷ WITNESS is a US-based NGO that uses the power of video and storytelling to open the eyes of the world to human rights abuses. WITNESS received 56 questions between its application in 2008 and being recommended for status in 2013.

¹⁸ Asylum Access is a US-based NGO that empowers refugees to assert their human rights through legal aid, strategic litigation, policy advocacy and community education. It received 18 questions between its application in 2010 and being recommended for status in 2013.

¹⁹ Stichting Justitia et Pax Nederland is an NGO based in the Netherlands that raises awareness about the barriers to access to justice, and takes action to eliminate them. It received 1 question between its application in 2011 and being recommended for status in 2013.

²⁰ The ECCHR is an NGO based in Germany dedicated to protecting civil and human rights throughout Europe. It received 8 questions between applying in 2011 and being recommended for status in 2013.

²¹ This Switzerland-based NGO, which focuses on human rights in Western Sahara, has received 35 questions and 3 objections since it applied for status in 2009.

²² [19] The US-based International Wages Due Lesbians and Australian-based Coalition of Activist Lesbians have had consultative status since 1998 and 1999, respectively. Since then, with one exception (COC-Netherlands, which was recommended by the Committee by a vote of 7-6 in 2008), ECOSOC has granted SOGI groups consultative status only after first overturning negative recommendations from the Committee: Danish National Association for Gay and Lesbians, the European Region of the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA-Europe), and the Lesbian and Gay Federation in Germany (2006); the Gay and Lesbian Coalition of Québec and the Swedish Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Rights (2007); State Federation of Lesbians, Gays, Transsexuals and Bisexuals of Spain (FELGTB) (2008); Brazilian Federation of LGBT Groups (Associação Brasileira de Gays, Lésbicas e Transgêneros (2009); International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (2010); and the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA) (2011).

²³ Consultative status provides NGOs with access to a range of fora at the UN, including the Human Rights Council, ECOSOC and its subsidiary bodies, UN conferences, and special events organized by the President of the General Assembly.

²⁴ Members of the NGO Committee for the period 2011-2014 are: Belgium, Bulgaria, Burundi, China, Cuba, India, Israel, Kyrgyzstan, Morocco, Mozambique, Nicaragua, Pakistan, Peru, Russian Federation, Senegal, Sudan, Turkey, United States of America, and Venezuela.

²⁵ Despite the small size of the Committee (19 members) relative to the number UN Member States (193), the membership of the Committee is remarkably constant. A seat on the Committee ensures that a State can play a key role in deciding which NGOs are granted consultative status. Russia/former USSR has held a seat on the Committee since its inception in 1946. Cuba has been on the Committee from 1975 until now with the exception of 1983-1989. China was on the Committee from 1946-1960, 1995-2003 and 2006-present. Of the Committee members that are friendlier to civil society, the US has been on the Committee since its inception, with the exception of 1991-1994. The UK was on the Committee from 1946-1979, 1995-2001 and 2007-2010.

²⁶ Currently, the oldest application before the Committee is that of the Asian-Eurasian Human Rights Forum, which applied for consultative status in 2002.