

Open Letter to ECOSOC regarding upcoming elections to the Committee on NGOs

Member States of ECOSOC

Cc: Chair of the Committee on NGOs, President of the General Assembly, President of the Human Rights Council, Member States of the UN General Assembly, UN Secretary General.

14 March, 2018

Excellencies,

We write to you regarding the upcoming elections to the ECOSOC Committee on NGOs for the 2019-2022 term, which will take place on April 16.

NGOs are an essential partner of the UN, as recognized by article 71 of the UN Charter as well as ECOSOC Resolution 1996/31, which acknowledges “the breadth of non-governmental organizations' expertise” and their capacity “to support the work of the United Nations.” The Committee on NGOs plays a necessary role in facilitating this partnership by considering NGO applications for consultative status with the UN and assessing the contributions of accredited NGOs to ECOSOC. The Committee makes recommendations about which NGOs will enjoy access and participation rights and which will not. Given the importance of the tasks of the Committee, it is essential that members uphold the highest standards in regard to fulfilling the Committee’s mandate in a fair, apolitical manner.

The practice of the Committee has been the object of much criticism for failing to treat applicant and accredited NGOs objectively. Some members of the Committee use membership as a means to keep some NGOs – particularly human rights NGOs – out of the UN. Recent, positive developments – the webcasting of all open sessions of the Committee and the invitation to accredited NGOs to meet with the Committee – have all come about due to ECOSOC interventions, not as a result of initiatives taken by the Committee itself.

Membership of the Committee on NGOs matters. The upcoming elections to the NGO Committee in April, for the 2019-2022 term provide States with a commitment to ensuring civil society access and participation with the opportunity to put themselves forward as candidates. ECOSOC members will also be able to show they are committed to fair practice for civil society through who they elect.

In addition, membership of the Committee on NGOs is currently not subject to term limits. The organizations joining this letter believe the introduction of term limits would allow for greater diversity within the Committee over time. States should be required to leave the Committee for a specific period after serving the maximum agreed terms.

We urge all ECOSOC Member States to commit to electing to the Committee on NGOs States that have a positive record in regard to ensuring a safe and enabling environment for civil society to operate in and addressing cases of intimidation and reprisals swiftly and effectively, as encouraged in Human Rights

Council consensus resolutions on civil society space.¹ Similarly, we urge all candidates for membership on the Committee on NGOs to commit publicly to ensuring a safe, enabling environment for civil society to operate in, including at the United Nations.

The upcoming elections for the Committee on NGOs are an opportunity for States to put into practice a genuine commitment to promoting civil society access and participation at the UN either as candidates or electors. We hope that they will lead to much needed transformation in the membership, as well as the practice, of the Committee on NGOs.

Yours sincerely,

Amnesty International

Civicus: World Alliance for Citizen Participation

Conectas Direitos Humanos

Freedom Now

Human Rights Watch

Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights

International Service for Human Rights

¹ A/HRC/32/31 Civil Society Space