

KINGDOM OF BELGIUM



Minister-Counsellor Filip De Maesschalck

ECOSOC Management Segment - Report of the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations on its 2024 resumed session

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New York, 23 July 2024

Chair,

Belgium subscribes to the EU statement.

In our national capacity we would like to reiterate our strong conviction that civic space at the United Nations is of vital importance. We cannot enjoy effective and legitimate multilateralism without meaningful participation by civil society in our work.

Actors from civil society provide us with invaluable expertise, hold us, Member States accountable, and enrich our deliberations by directly bringing voices from the field into UN meeting rooms.

This conviction is not just a national one. It has been part and parcel of the United Nations from the beginning. That is why the UN Charter gives the Economic and Social Council the responsibility to make suitable arrangements for consultation with non-governmental organizations. This was last operationalized through Resolution 1996/31, which also tasks an ECOSOC subsidiary body, the Committee on NGOs. Which brings us to today's meeting.

Unfortunately, the Committee has not been able to fulfil its mandate. It has for example only twice held consultations with organizations in consultative status since Resolution 1996/31 was adopted although the resolution stipulates that this needs to happen before each of its sessions, and at other times as necessary.

We firmly disagree with those who argue that these consultations cannot be organized because of a lack of "consensus" on the matter in the Committee. Or because of an alleged lack of resources.

Another function on which the Committee is underperforming, is the granting of consultative status to NGOs. It is supposed to do this by screening applications followed by recommendations. We regret the many obstacles eligible NGOs face, such as irrelevant and repetitive questions, which ultimately lead to endless deferrals of the decisions on their applications.

Out of 476 applications for consultative status considered this session, 132 were new, and 344 were deferred from previous sessions. Only 103 of these were recommended for consultative status, a disappointing 21.6% of total applications for consultative status. This continues an alarming downward trend of low accreditation rates from preceding sessions: from 38.2% at the Regular and 33.4% at the Resumed sessions of 2023 to 26% in the latest 2024 regular session.

Chair,

As a result, initiatives to adapt the working methods of the NGO Committee with a view to increase its transparency, efficiency and accountability have been proposed before. We commend the UK and Costa Rica for having put forward a new proposal to improve the work of the Committee, as now contained in draft decision VII in the report on its 2024 resumed session before us.

We welcome in particular the decision in operational paragraph 5 to hold annual consultations with organizations in consultative status, in line with the existing mandate given by ECOSOC almost 30 years ago. As this is a longstanding mandate given by the Council this should be done without any new programme budget implications (PBIs), regardless of the format, scope and modalities of those consultations.

Nonetheless, we welcome the request to the Secretary General to increase support to the Non-governmental Organizations section of the Secretariat in the context of his next budget proposal. This request merely repeats the request to the Secretary-General for the necessary resources in Resolution 1996/31. The new and unexpected PBI that was circulated in an Oral Statement only on Friday night 19/07 – and updated on Monday 22/07 – is not only concerning from a procedural point of view, but also substantively concerns remain about the justification of a PBI given that the decision targets the next programme budget proposal by the Secretary General.

We regret that provisions aimed at facilitating hybrid modalities for participation by NGOs in the interactive segment of the Committee were already deleted earlier in the process after alleged practical and financial obstacles appeared last minute in the context of the NGO-committee resumed session.

We truly hope that the informal working group that was tasked with the further consideration of options to improve the methods of work of the Committee will proceed in good faith, allowing it to report its recommendations to the Economic and Social Council as soon as possible.

In case this working group and the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations itself do not deliver, the Economic and Social Council, as the parent body of the Committee, has

the mandate and in fact the duty to act itself. It must take the necessary measures in order to discharge itself of its important responsibility as stipulated in the UN Charter.

Finally, chair, until progress is made regarding the accreditation process, we continue to welcome initiatives like the decision that will be presented today by the United States to grant consultative status to 2 eligible and credible NGOs.

Both of them have been unduly deferred by the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations for more than four years, responding diligently to each and every question in a timely manner. They also volunteered in order for their application to be brought forward by a vote and the information of their application requests was shared in full so ECOSOC-members were able to make an independent assessment.

We must act now to grant these NGOs consultative status and enable them to contribute to our work here at the UN.