

December 13, 2022

**TO:** Your Excellency Secretary General of the United Nations, António Guterres,  
**AND TO:** Your Excellency Csaba Kőrösi, President of the 77th General Assembly,  
**AND TO:** Your Excellency, José Alfonso Blanco Conde, Chair of the Third Committee,  
**AND TO:** Your Excellency Lachezara Stoeva, President of the Economic and Social Council,  
**AND TO:** Your Excellency Mine Ozgul Bilman, VP of the UN Committee on NGOs, and  
**AND TO:** Wook-Jin Chang, Chief of the NGO Branch

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**[Re: consultations of the Committee on Non-governmental Organizations with civil society organizations in consultative status with ECOSOC regarding the evolving relationship between the NGOs and the United Nations: proposal for a code of conduct for engaging with non-state actors](#)**

Dear Excellencies,

The United Nations and governments around the world stress the important contributions of civil society organizations to help address challenges to human health, climate and the environment, human rights, peace, equity, access to nutritious food systems, access to clean water for drinking, sanitation, irrigation, and energy-generation the pursuit of the Sustainable Development Goals to protect and improve those precious resources.

For instance, 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”—stresses the value of NGOs. Likewise, Secretary-General António Guterres vision on global collaboration for the next 24 years, [Our Common Agenda](#), concludes as follows:

*130. Finally, echoing calls made to the United Nations system, we have received suggestions on how to increase opportunities for engagement by **civil society and other stakeholders** across all the intergovernmental organs. These have included...calls for an [updated resolution](#) defining how organs like the Economic and Social Council, the General Assembly and the Security Council relate to civil society, local and regional governments and business actors, and for the President of the Economic and Social Council to convene a general review of arrangements for observer status or consultation in this regard. I encourage Member States to give serious consideration to these ideas, in keeping with our quest for a multilateralism that is more networked, inclusive and effective.*

And on December 2, 2022, His Excellency Mr. Csaba Kőrösi, President of the 77th session of the General Assembly, urged participants in a town hall with civil society to inform and energize “transformational change” at the United Nations and to be “bold and provocative” in aid of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in the spirit of global solidarity.

Though meetings of the ECOSOC Committee on NGOs are now webcast, and the number of ECOSOC-accredited NGOs has risen faster than the population—from approximately 2,000 to 6,000<sup>1</sup> between 2000 and 2019—there are many impediments to NGOs fully realizing their potential contributions to UN analysis and work.

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<sup>1</sup> Jurij Daniel Aston, The United Nations Committee on Non-governmental Organizations: Guarding the Entrance to a Politically Divided House, 2001, *European Journal of International Law* at page 948. Available at: <https://academic.oup.com/ejil/article/12/5/943/422278?login=false>

A code of conduct for engaging with civil society organizations—if promoted by the good offices of the Chair of the Committee, President of the Economic and Social Council, President of the General Assembly, and the Secretary-General—could help ensure that CSOs have the resources, access, and transparency necessary to effectively contribute to UN and member state work. Engagement with CSOs should not be arbitrary and contingent on the idiosyncrasies of leaders in governments and UN institutions.

Many civil society organizations bring extensive topic-specific expertise, implementation experience, corporate memory, free advice, and accountability functionalities that, often, governments and UN institutions often cannot perform.

The endorsing groups, below, urge the Committee on Non-Governmental Organization to lead or collaborate in consultations on and negotiations of a model code of conduct for engaging with civil society and promote its use by UN institutions and national governments. Without effective engagement with CSOs and journalists, UN institutions and governments will be deprived of valuable insights and legitimacy that are necessary for them to be effective.

As a starting point, please consider the following elements for a zero draft of a **United Nations Code of Conduct for Interacting with Civil Society in Standard-Setting and Research Talks (UN CCIC-SSTART) with the following elements:**

**Key governance elements**

1. **Establish clear conflict of interest safeguards.** Require financial conflict-of-interest declarations from participants by either requiring that they self-identify as business interest organizations or specify the amount and percentage of funds they received from commercial organizations in the four most recent fiscal years in written and oral submissions. Also, stipulate considerations for recusing parties with conflicts of interest to ensure they cannot put such interest above public interests, globally and nationally.
2. **Facilitate granting temporary travel visas for CSOs to participate in international consultations.** Create a protocol for granting timely temporary visitors' visas for citizens or residents (usually from developing countries) to participate in in-person UN meetings except in unusual circumstances.
3. **Establish a special envoy on CSO participation.** Appoint a Special Envoy for Civil Society to work for civic space at the UN. (This was [recommendation #5 in "Un-Mute Civil Society" by the Permanent Missions of Denmark and Costa Rica, the UN Foundation, CIVICUS, Action for Sustainable Development, Global Focus, and Action Aid International and Forums.](#))
4. **Prepare and publish annual progress reports.** Table annual progress reports prepared by the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in the ECOSOC Council (and corresponding governing bodies of the United Nations and national government institutions) describing:
  - a) the status of uptake of elements of the *Code*;
  - b) a time-delimited plan for fully implementing the *Code*, and
  - c) results of an opinion survey of ECOSOC-accredited CSOs (or national NGOs as the case may be) on the status of implementation of the *Code*.
5. **Establish a travel fund to facilitate in-person participation in complex longer meetings by CSOs based in lower-income countries and technology transfer to facilitate remote participation from places where access to Internet access and computer and communication technology are expensive or unreliable.** A significant impediment to participation of low- and middle-income countries is the expense of foreign air travel, including room and board in the host destination. Securing inexpensive or free airline transportation and lodging for NGO representatives from low-income countries from major airline carriers (whose operations are subject

to international regulations) and, for instance, trading meeting space opportunities in UN institutions for living space in hotels and university lodging (when they are largely vacant during high vacancy periods) might be possible. Likewise, coordinating penalty-free donations of frequent flyer points to a fund to offset travel expenses for low-income country NGO delegates might be feasible. All of the elements of the proposed *Code of Conduct* would disproportionately advantage low-income-country NGOs. Civil society organizations are major sources of free advice to governments.

6. **Protection of public interest advocates and civic space:** Establish an expert mechanism on the investigation, prevention, and redress of reports of intimidation and retribution visited upon civil society organizations for public interest advocacy about health, human rights, environmental protection, press freedom, and other matters and receive and investigate individual reports

#### Common courtesies

7. **Ensure timely notice of opportunities to participate in consultation and other activities.** Ensure CSOs get adequate notice of meetings, e.g., more than 14 days for fully remote/virtual meetings and more than one month for hybrid or face-to-face international meetings, and two weeks for national meetings. NGOs based in low-income countries often require even more notice to participate in consultations, especially if doing so requires mobilizing scarce financial resources for travel or extra time to obtain approval of temporary visas.
8. **Enable NGO contact with news media.** Enable and facilitate CSOs' access to UN news correspondents in UN institutions.
9. **Facilitate open communication when online digital communication tools are used.** By default, set MS Teams, Zoom, and other digital interaction tools to optimize communication of opinions and information resources (e.g., ensure visibility of chat/Q&A to all participants, enable chat and transcript saving by all participants, and enable bilateral and reply-all communications).
10. **Make meetings accessible to people who experience visual and hearing impairments.** Ensure that, at least meetings serviced by simultaneous interpretation are also supported by closed-caption text and sign language.

#### Elements that are consistent with best practices in national governance

11. **Create, promote, and maintain a public consultation register.** Create a UN-wide (or government-wide, as the case may be) public consultation registry so that CSOs can automatically be notified (e.g., by email alerts) of consultations related to topics of their interest and do not have to risk being accidentally omitted from ad-hoc consultation lists or risk being intentionally excluded by cherry-picked consultation lists.
12. **Ensure transparent rules for in-camera meetings.** Establish standards for member states going in-camera (i.e., private meetings from which CSOs and journalists are excluded) and urging that the default approach is fully public meetings. When governments appear secretive about setting strategies, policies, or laws that affect 8 billion people, it can breed cynicism about the predominance of private, self-serving interests.
13. **Ensure that non-governmental organizations can participate in standard-setting or strategy-development consultations prior to decisions being taken.** Relegating non-governmental organizations to comment on decisions *after* they have been taken is disingenuous and deprives decision-makers of the benefit of CSOs' insights, belittles their perspectives, and diminishes the legitimacy of the resulting decisions.
14. **Automatically post NGO written and oral submission online.** Ensure that the actual content (not summaries) of CSO submissions is available on decision-makers' websites in video and text format

and, ideally, automatic uploading directly by registered participants subject to a bar on abusive comments or a threshold of inaccuracy that governments are willing to tolerate by all parties.

15. **Ensure transparency about government positions in UN standard-setting consultations.** Urge governments of member states to characterize the steps they took to arrive at member state positions even with just a URL reference to the consultation website.
16. **Create a lobbyist registry.** Create a lobbyist registry indicating when, where and by whom UN officials (or governments) meet with outside parties in meetings that are not broadcast on <https://media.un.org/en/webtv>. If people believe that public and international institutions make decisions on the basis of secret, unilateral meetings—especially with those with vested or undisclosed interests—the legitimacy and effectiveness of those UN agencies or governments will suffer.
17. **Create an access-to-information mechanism.** Create access to information (also known as freedom of information) entitlements to records held by United Nations institutions (or national governments) and a process for obtaining such records and appealing decisions to redact or withhold them.
18. **Ensure that granting ECOSOC accreditation adheres to objective criteria and is not subject to arbitrary political interference by individual Committee members.** In particular, to protect the integrity of the CSO vetting process, ensure that:
  - a) **UN institutes resolve arbitrary, repetitive deferrals of ECOSOC NGO applications by holding Committee votes.** Discontinue arbitrary deferrals of ECOSOC approvals of ECOSOC accreditation by the Committee on NGOs by stipulating that decisions must be put to a vote after two deferrals to reduce the risk of the tyranny of the minority (e.g., certain member states repeatedly delaying accreditation decisions on groups that might be critical of their human rights record) while retaining oversight in the accreditation process;
  - b) **Elections of NGO committee members are effective.** All regions propose competitive slates of candidates at least two months prior to elections to replace retiring Committee members to facilitate vetting and screening of candidates by the Economic and Social Council;
  - c) **ECOSOC institutes term limits for membership in the Committee on NGOs:** As with other UN bodies, states and individual members should be required to leave the Committee for a specified interval of time after serving for a stipulated maximum period. Term limits would encourage greater diversity and youth in membership over time.
19. **Promote transparency, accountability, fairness, inclusiveness, and conflict of interest safeguards, worldwide.** Respect and promote the aims of this Code *mutatis mutandis* by all public institutions.

While this is a non-exhaustive list of enabling factors for improving the integrity and effectiveness of UN and government engagement with civil society organizations, a robust, focused consultation on a code of conduct and vetting of best-practices nationally could help ensure that UN institutions make the best use of civil society engagement. Doing so will be even more vital in the short time remaining to make up lost time in achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals and mobilizing to meet their successors.

Respectfully submitted,

[provisional list of endorsers is as follows, to be confirmed/updated on Monday December 12, 2022]

1. Accao Nacional para o Desenvolvimento Comunitario (ANADEC), Ginea-Bissau
2. ACEH-les Compagnons Solidaires Action Terre d'Afrique, France

3. Adaamasunle Foundation, Nigeria
4. Advocacy Initiative for Development (AID), Sierra Leone
5. Advocates for Youth, United States of America
6. African Centre for Global Health and Social Transformation (ACHEST), Uganda
7. AFRICAN Centre for Human Advancement Social and Community Development, Nigeria
8. African Heritage Foundation Nigeria, Nigeria
9. Agence des droits de l'Homme (Human Rights Agency), Belgium/Switzerland
10. AIM Education and Research Society, India
11. American Human Rights Council, United States of America
12. American Indian Law Alliance, United States of America
13. Amis des Etrangers au Togo (A.D.E.T.), Togo
14. Amman Center for Human Rights Studies, Jordan
15. Apostle Padi Ologo Traditional Birth Centre, Ghana
16. Anglican Rite Roman Catholic Church, United States of America
17. Appui Solidaire pour le Renforcement de l'Aide au Developpement, Mali
18. Ariel Foundation International, Switzerland
19. Armenian Association of Women with University Education, Armenia
20. Armenian Constitutional Right - Protective Centre (ACRPC), Armenia
21. Association d'Aide à l'Education de l'Enfant Handicapé (AAEEH), France
22. Association de l'Unité Spéciale Républicaine (ASUS RELUC), Cameroon
23. Association de Lutte Contre les Violences Sexuelles et Appui à la Promotion du Développement Durable ALUCOVIS-APDD, Burundi
24. Association for Promotion Sustainable Development, India
25. Association for the Protection of Women's and Children's Rights (APWCR), United States
26. Association Ma'onah for Human Rights and Immigration, Yemen
27. Association of Community Social Volunteers International, Nigeria
28. Association of World Citizens, United States of America
29. Association pour la Diffusion des Droits humains aux peuples autochtones (Humanitarian Law Agency), Cameroon
30. Association pour l'Integration et le Developpement Durable au Burundi, AIDB, Burundi
31. AWTAD Anti-Corruption Organization, Yemen
32. Baby Milk Action IBFAN UK, United Kingdom
33. Belady US: An Island for Humanity, United States of America
34. Blessed Aid, Democratic Republic of Congo
35. Bridgers Association, Cameroon
36. Burundi Rugby League Rugby a XIII Cooperative, Burundi
37. Casa Hunter, Brazil
38. Centre Africain de Recherche Industrielle, Democratic Republic of the Congo
39. Centre for Health Science and Law, (corresponding author: [BillJeffery@HealthScienceAndLaw.ca](mailto:BillJeffery@HealthScienceAndLaw.ca)), Canada
40. Coalition des Volontaires pour la Paix et le Développement (CVPD), Democratic Republic of Congo
41. CO-HABITER, Switzerland
42. Company of the Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul, Brazil
43. Congregation of the Mission, Italy
44. Consultation Education Evaluation, Inc., United States of America

45. Cooperation for Peace and Development (CPD), Afghanistan
46. Coordination des Associations et des Particuliers pour la Liberté de Conscience, France
47. Cork Forest Conservation Alliance, United States of America
48. Dalgarno Institute, Australia
49. Dementia Alliance International, United States of America
50. Denis Miki Foundation, Cameroon
51. DESSI International, Pakistan
52. Do for Children, Malawi
53. Dynamique des femmes juristes, Democratic Republic of Congo
54. Eagle Vision Charity, Inc., United States of America
55. Earth, India
56. Earth Day.org, United States of America
57. Entrepreneurship Development and Support Initiative, Nigeria
58. Federation of Environmental and Ecological Diversity for Agricultural Revampment and Human Rights, The (FEEDAR & HR), Cameroon
59. FITILLA, Mali
60. Force juvénile pour un avenir rassurant, Benin
61. Forum des Femmes Autochtones du Cameroun ( FFAC), Cameroon
62. Forum des ONG, Côte d'Ivoire
63. Global Distribution Advocates, Inc., United States of America
64. Global Environmental and Climate Conservation Initiative (GECCI), Nigeria
65. Global Integrated Education Volunteers Association, Nigeria
66. Global Peace and Development Organization, Liberia
67. Hamraah Foundation, India
68. Healthy Start Initiative, Nigeria
69. Himalayan Research and Cultural Foundation, India
70. Human Rights Sanrakshan Sansthaa, India
71. Imani Works Corporation , United States of America
72. Indigenous Peoples Global Forum for Sustainable Development, IPGFforSD (International Indigenous Platform), Germany
73. Institute for Development Research and Alternatives, Albania
74. International Association For Hospice and Palliative Care, United States of America
75. International Centre for Peace Charities and Human Development, Nigeria
76. International Council of Psychologists (ICP), United States of America
77. International Institute for Child Protection, Gambia
78. International Longevity Centre Canada, Canada
79. International Movement for Advancement of Education Culture Social & Economic Development (IMAECSED), India
80. International Radio Emergency Support Coalition (IRESC), United States of America
81. International Society for Peace and Safety, Nigeria
82. International Sociological Association, Spain
83. International-Lawyers.Org (INTLawyers), Switzeland
84. Internationale Gemeinschaft für die Unterstützung von Kriegsopfern (International Community for the Support of War Victims), Germany
85. ISIZIBA Community Based Organizations of South Africa

86. Keunghhee (Kathy) Kim, Ed.d, SJD, Indiana University Maurer School of Law, United States of America
87. Khmer National Liberation Front, Denmark
88. Knowledge Mill Int'l Foundation Nigeria , Nigeria
89. La Proteccion de la Infancia, Inc., Philippines
90. l'Association pour la Protection de l'Environnement et du Développement Durable de Bizerte (APEDDUB), Tunisia
91. Liberian United Youth for Community Safety and Development LUYCSD, Liberia
92. Madhira Institute, Kenya
93. Mandela Center International, South Africa
94. Media Education Centre Serbia, Serbia
95. Mijoro Mandroso, Madagascar
96. Misère Option Zéro, Togo
97. Montserrat Rafel , General Director, Dianova International (in personal capacity), Spain
98. Movement for protection of African Child (Mopotac-Africa), Nigeria
99. Najet Karaborni, former Senior Interregional Adviser in policy development, governance, public administration and NGO sector development, Tunisia
100. National Council of Women, Malta
101. Ndingicam Equity, Cameroon
102. Neda'a Foundation for Development, Yemen
103. New Era Educational and Charitable Support Foundation, Nigeria
104. NEXUS Global, United States of America
105. Nigerian Association of Commercial Commuters (NACC), Nigeria
106. Occupational Knowledge International, United States of America
107. Okogun Odigie Safewomb International Foundation, Nigeria
108. ONG Afrique Esperance, Benin
109. Organisation apposition et engagement civique (OAEC), Tunisia
110. Pacific Islands Association of Non-Governmental Organisations (PIANGO), Fiji
111. Passionists International, United States of America
112. Pakistan Rural Workers Social Welfare Organization, Pakistan
113. Peace and Life Enhancement Initiative Intonational, Nigeria
114. PEACE Trust, India
115. People's Vigilance Committee on Human Rights (PVCHR), India
116. Pleadors of Children and Elderly People at Risk (PEPA), Democratic Republic of the Congo
117. Pop Culture Hero Coalition, Inc., United States of America
118. Public-Private Integrity, Gambia
119. Rede Nacional de Combate ao Tráfico de Animais Silvestres (RENCTAS), Brazil
120. RightOnCanada, Canada
121. Salesian Missions, Inc., United States of America
122. Samarthanam Trust for the Disabled, India
123. Sanid Organization for Relief and Development (SORD), Yemen
124. Sathi Amuha(Friends Group), Nepal
125. Shine Africa Foundation (SAF-Teso), Uganda
126. Sirius Global Animal Organisation, New Zealand
127. Sisters of Charity Federation, United States of America

128. Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, United States of America
129. Social and Healthy Action for Rural Empowerment, India
130. Society for Development and Community Empowerment, Nigeria
131. Society for Economic Empowerment and Entrepreneurship Development (SEEED),  
Nigeria
132. Society for the Protection of the Rights of the Child, Pakistan
133. South African Coloured Corps Brigade, South Africa
134. South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario (SALCO), Canada
135. South Sudanese Women Mission for Peace, South Sudan
136. Statewide Waste and Environmental Education Foundation, Nigeria
137. Strength in Diversity Development Centre, Nigeria
138. Sustainable Environment Development Initiative, Nigeria
139. Sylvia Earle Alliance / Mission Blue, United States of America
140. Syrian Environment Protection Society (SEPS), Syria
141. The Cosmos Foundation , Democratic Republic of the Congo
142. The Healthy Real Initiative for Valued Entrepreneurship (THrive), Nigeria
143. The New Generation Girls and Women Development Initiative (NIGAWD), Nigeria
144. The Reformed Drug and Substance Abuse Initiative, Nigeria
145. The Secure Aid Relief Foundation, United States of America
146. The Vision for Teenagers Adolescents and Youths Wellbeing Initiative, Nigeria
147. Thomas Schwarz, Executive Secretary, MMI Network, Switzerland
148. Udisha, India
149. Universal Versatile Society, India
150. Vision GRAM-International, Canada
151. Vision Mondiale de la Santé, France
152. Wild Migration, Australia
153. Women Against Violence and Exploitation Foundation, Nigeria
154. World Association for Sexual Health, United Kingdom
155. World Peace Foundation, United States of America
156. Yayasan Pendidikan, Indonesia
157. Yerima Balla International Education Initiative, Nigeria
158. Young Professional Development Society of Cyprus (YPDSN), Cyprus
159. Young Professional Development Society Nepal (YPDSN), Nepal
160. Young Professional Development Society of Sweden (YPDSN), Sweden