**Launching 2017 Coordination Segment, Economic and Social Council Adopts 10 Decisions, Elects Subsidiary Body Members amid Debate on NGO Participation**

The Economic and Social Council today adopted 10 decisions and elected dozens of members to its subsidiary bodies, as it kicked off the coordination and management meetings of its 2017 session.

The bulk of today’s discussions focused on improving the work methods of the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations, a subsidiary body charged with granting United Nations consultative status to civil society groups.  The Council decided to grant that status to Christian Solidarity Worldwide, which had been rejected by the NGO Committee more than a dozen times, by a recorded vote of 28 in favour to 9 against (Burkina Faso, China, India, Pakistan, Russian Federation, South Africa, Turkey, Venezuela, Viet Nam), with 12 abstentions.

Estonia’s representative, on behalf of the European Union, noted with concern that a significant number of applications were being rejected on “spurious” or politically motivated grounds.  He said Christian Solidarity Worldwide had been rejected in 14 sessions of the NGO Committee, despite having responded diligently to more over 80 questions about its activities.

Several other delegates defended their right to raise questions and request information in order to make informed decisions.  China’s delegate, noting that the principles and purposes of the United Nations Charter included respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, called it imperative that all non-governmental organizations seeking consultative status meet such standards.

Pakistan’s delegate said it was the prerogative of any NGO Committee member to seek information on the work of civil society organizations.  Christian Solidarity Worldwide was not the only one that had been requested to provide further details.  Seeking a reversal of the Committee’s decision would set a dangerous precedent.

Other speakers stressed the need for transparency and accountability, questioning why the NGO Committee was the only subsidiary body that was not webcast.  To improve work methods, the Council decided that the public meetings of the Committee’s next session would be webcast, in a recorded vote of 37 in favour to 0 against, with 16 abstentions.

Before the vote, Norway’s speaker stressed that the principle of openness must be present, particularly in a body dealing with civil society.  Many members echoed each other on the issue of accountability and transparency, with the delegates from Uruguay and Chile both saying that webcasting the Committee would allow non-governmental organizations from developing countries to access the proceedings if they could not afford to travel in person to Headquarters.

On that point, China’s delegate said that in reviewing the draft decision’s co-sponsors, it was obvious that developing countries were not on board.  Several delegates, including the representative of the Russian Federation, had abstained from the vote, explaining that the Council should not take up decisions which should be made in the Committee.

The Council also adopted without a vote the following seven draft decisions contained in the NGO Committee report on its 2017 regular session:  “Withdrawal of consultative status of the non-governmental organization ‘Kimse Yok Mu’”; “Withdrawal of consultative status of the non-governmental organization ‘Gazetecuiler ve Yazarlar Vakfi’”; “Withdrawal of consultative status of the non-governmental organization ‘Turkiye Isadamlari ve Sanayiciler Konfederasyonu’”; “Refrain from contacting or communicating with three organizations whose legal status has ceased to exist and, based on that, whose consultative status was recommended for withdrawal at the first meeting of the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations, held on 30 January 2017”; “Request for withdrawal of consultative status”; and “Report of the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations on its 2017 regular session”.

Also today, the Council appointed Belize to its Ad Hoc Advisory Group on Haiti, adopting its draft decision on “Coordination, programme and other questions: Long-term programme of support for Haiti”.

It also elected members to and filled outstanding vacancies on the following subsidiary bodies:  International Narcotics Control Board; Statistical Commission; Commission on Population and Development; Commission on the Status of Women; Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice; Intergovernmental Working Group of Experts on International Standards of Accounting and Reporting; Executive Board of the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF); Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees; Executive Board of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)/United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)/United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS); Executive Board of the World Food Programme (WFP); Commission for Social Development; Commission on Science and Technology for Development; Governing Council of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat); Organizational Committee of the Peacebuilding Commission; Committee for Programme and Coordination; and Programme Coordinating Board of the Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS).

Also speaking today were representatives of Armenia, United Kingdom, Australia (also on behalf of Canada, Iceland, Liechtenstein, New Zealand and Switzerland), South Africa, Viet Nam, Chile, Brazil, Venezuela and Mexico.

The Council will meet again Thursday 20 April at 10 a.m. to continue its Coordination and Management Meeting.

Action

The Council began the day adopting without a vote the draft decision (document E/2017/L.14), introduced by the representative of Canada, requesting that it appoint the Permanent Representative of Belize as an additional member of the Ad Hoc Advisory Group of Haiti.

Non-Governmental Organizations

The Council then turned its attention to the report of the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations on its 2017 regular session (document [E/2017/32, Part I\*](http://undocs.org/E/2017/32(PartI))).

The representative of the United States said her country believed in the freedom of speech, the recognition of civil society as advocates and that the voices of critics could make society better.  “Governments should not be all things to all people,” she said.  The best outcomes could only be achieved by engaging civil society partners, all of whom should have a voice, regardless of their views.  It was of great concern that systematic action was being taken by a number of Governments to repress human rights defenders, journalists and others.  She expressed concern that the NGO Committee had ignored the Council’s rules in its most recent proceedings and that its meetings were not webcast, as doing so could bring much-needed transparency to its activities.

The representative of Estonia, on behalf of the European Union, said the Council’s scrutiny of the NGO Committee was an important safeguard.  By any measure, the Committee had fallen short in the discharge of its duties.  During its last session, it had rejected a significant number of applications on “spurious” or politically motivated grounds, he said, recalling that Christian Solidarity Worldwide had been rejected in 14 sessions, despite that it had responded diligently to more than 80 questions.  It was up to the Council to “right this wrong,” he said.

Emphasizing the need for the Committee to follow the rules that governed its work, he said it must follow the example of other subsidiary bodies and permit the webcasting of its proceedings.  It was all the more important that the body charged with deliberating the presence of civil society at the United Nations was itself open and transparent.  He also warned against wasting time debating whether non-governmental organizations could intervene at certain moments during the Committee’s session.  That should be an accepted fact, as non-governmental organizations were essential to the effective functioning of the United Nations.

Armenia said it was important to take stock of the NGO Committee, as it had demonstrated considerable shortcomings.  During its last session, it had fallen short in ensuring transparency and impartiality.  The unfair scrutiny faced by Armenian non-governmental organizations was concerning, she said, stressing that the Committee’s membership process had been abused.  That was the wrong message to send to civil society and undermined the United Nations reputation, she said, underscoring the importance of ensuring transparency.

Norway expressed concern over the shrinking space and restrictions facing civil society around the world.  The Committee had an important role to play in overseeing the process by which non-governmental groups obtained consultative status within the Council.  He expressed concern that the Committee had set aside the rules of procedure and lacked transparency, stressing that there was no need for it to debate interventions by non-governmental organizations, which should be welcomed by its members.

The representative of Uruguay, speaking also for Chile and Mexico, said cooperation between non-governmental organizations and the United Nations was on the rise.  The contributions of civil society, through their relationships with the Council, had helped the United Nations achieve its most important goals, particularly around the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.  The relevance of the NGO Committee’s mandate left much to be desired, she said, expressing concern that more than 70 per cent of applications had been systematically deferred for unfounded reasons.

The Council then turned to a draft decision titled “Application of the non-governmental organization Christian Solidarity Worldwide for consultative status with the Economic and Social Council” (document E/2017/L.16).

The representative of the United Kingdom, introducing that text, said the Sustainable Development Goals would not be achieved without the support of a wide range of stakeholders, including non-governmental organizations.  The aim should be to enable — not frustrate — the participation of civil society.  Despite that its application had been considered and deferred for more than seven years, Christian Solidarity Worldwide had clearly fulfilled all requirements and could enhance the Council’s work.  Its vital work included promotion of the right to religious freedom.  There had been repeated discrimination against groups that focused on human rights.

Speaking before the vote, the representative of Australia said civil society brought valuable expertise to discussions at the United Nations, including on issues related to freedom of religion and human rights.  While the NGO Committee played a valuable role as a gatekeeper, she expressed concern that the rules and procedures had not always been applied in the spirit in which they were intended, and were in fact being misused to prevent non-governmental groups from being granted consultative status.

The representative of Pakistan said it was the prerogative of any member of the NGO Committee to seek information on the activities of civil society organizations.  Christian Solidarity Worldwide was not the only organization that had been requested to provide further details to the NGO Committee, and seeking a reversal of the Committee’s decision would set a dangerous precedent.

The representative of South Africa voiced support for civil society participation in the United Nations system.  However, South Africa had serious concerns about attempts to circumvent the Committee’s decisions and would thus maintain its position taken during the Committee’s main session.

The representative of Viet Nam said he shared the concerns expressed by a number of Committee members over the application of Christian Solidarity Worldwide.  Requesting more time for discussion, he said he would vote against the draft decision.

The representative of China said that while non-governmental organizations had a critical role in the United Nations, their participation must be based on rules.  Noting that the principles and purposes of the United Nations Charter included respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, he said it was imperative for all organizations to meet such standards.  Committees had the right to raise questions and request information in order to make an informed decision.  If a Member State was not satisfied with the answers provided, that meant the non-governmental organization lacked respect for the Committee.

The Council then adopted the draft decision by a recorded vote of 28 in favour to 9 against (Burkina Faso, China, India, Pakistan, Russian Federation, South Africa, Turkey, Venezuela, Vietnam), with 12 abstentions.

The representative of Russian Federation said he had voted against the text, as there had been no reason to review the Committee’s recommendations.  Only the Committee had the responsibility to examine non-governmental organizations seeking consultative status.  Any other action undermined its work.

The Council next turned to the draft decision on “Improving the work of the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations” (document E/2017/L.17).

The representative of Chile introduced the text, which he said called for the public meetings of the NGO Committee to be webcast as a means for ensuring that its work was more accessible, including for organizations unable send a participant to them.  The draft decision took into account the expertise provided by non-governmental organizations, as well as their ability to support the work of the United Nations.

The representative of Australia, speaking also on behalf of Canada, Iceland, Liechtenstein, New Zealand and Switzerland, stressed that civil society groups brought valuable expertise.  Their participation legitimized the work of the United Nations.  Webcasting NGO Committee proceedings would greatly improve its outcomes by improving its efficiency and transparency.

The representative of Brazil said his country was a staunch supporter of increased engagement of civil society.  Webcasting the public meetings of the NGO Committee would be crucial for ensuring that non-governmental organizations from developing countries could follow deliberations about their applications.

The representative of Chile said the Committee had demonstrated its inability to improve its working methods.  Applications had accumulated and been deferred.  Webcasting had not materialized and a lack of transparency persisted.  People must be able to follow the Committee’s work, particularly those in developing countries who were unable to make the trip to New York.

The representative of Uruguay underscored the importance of transparency and the need to webcast NGO Committee meetings, which would improve access to its work, particularly for those organizations unable to travel to Headquarters.  Civil society groups had the right to understand how the Committee reviewed and assessed their applications.

The representative of China said the way in which Chile and Uruguay had tabled the draft decision contravened the principle of transparency.  “Forcing a draft decision in ECOSOC is not productive,” he said.  Some had said that the draft would be helpful to non-governmental groups in developing countries; however, when one reviewed the list of co-sponsors it was obvious that developing countries were not on board.

The representative of Norway, noting that the principles of openness and transparency must be present in a Committee dealing with civil society, said it was up to the Council to lay out the rules and guidance for the Committee.  He would vote in favour of the draft.

The representative of South Africa said NGO Committee decisions were thoroughly debated before being recommended to the Council.  She recalled that the NGO Committee had comprehensively considered its work methods during its last session, stressing that the Council should not prematurely undermine its work.

The representative of Venezuela said that while her country welcomed the contributions of civil society, she would abstain from the vote from a belief that the Council must be consistent with past practice and respect the need for broad-based, constructive and transparent consultation among all members.

The Council then adopted the draft decision by a vote of 37 in favour, to 0 against, with 16 abstentions.

The representative of the Russian Federation said he had abstained out of concern that decisions which should be made by the Committee were instead being taken up by the Council.

The representative of Viet Nam welcomed initiatives and proposals to improve the Committee’s work.  All United Nations bodies must benefit from webcast and the NGO Committee was no exception, he said, expressing concern over its workload.

The representative of Mexico said the decision just taken would help non-governmental organizations in developing countries create closer relationships with the United Nations, and in turn strengthen the Committee’s work.

The Council then turned to the report’s first chapter (document [E/2017/32, Part 1\*](http://undocs.org/E/2017/32(PartI))), which contained seven draft decisions, adopting without a vote draft decision I on “Applications for consultative status and requests for reclassification received from non-governmental organizations (document E/2017/L.16).

It went on to adopt without a vote draft decisions II through VII, respectively titled:  “Withdrawal of consultative status of the non-governmental organization ‘Kimse Yok Mu’”; “Withdrawal of consultative status of the non-governmental organization ‘Gazetecuiler ve Yazarlar Vakfi’”; “Withdrawal of consultative status of the non-governmental organization ‘Turkiye Isadamlari ve Sanayiciler Konfederasyonu’”; “Refrain from contacting or communicating with three organizations whose legal status has ceased to exist and, based on that, whose consultative status was recommended for withdrawal at the first meeting of the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations, held on 30 January 2017”; “Request for withdrawal of consultative status”; and “Report of the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations on its 2017 regular session”.

Elections

The Council also held elections to fill vacancies in many of its subsidiary bodies.

International Narcotics Control Board:  The Council elected by acclamation 20 members to serve a four-year term beginning on 1 January 2018:  Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, Togo and Algeria (African States); Afghanistan, India, Iraq and Kyrgyzstan (Asia-Pacific States); Croatia, Czech Republic and the Russian Federation (Eastern European States); and Brazil, Chile, Colombia and Cuba (Latin American and Caribbean States).

In one round of secret balloting, the Council also elected Belgium, Australia, Canada, Switzerland and France (Western European and Other States).

Statistical Commission:  The Council elected by acclamation seven members to serve a four-year term beginning on 1 January 2018:  Egypt and South Africa (African States); the Russian Federation (Eastern European States); Peru (Latin American and Caribbean States); and Canada, Denmark and the Netherlands (Western European and Other States).  It postponed the election of one member from the African States Group.

Commission on Population and Development:  The Council elected by acclamation 11 members to serve a four-year term, beginning at the first meeting of the fifty-second session in 2018 and expiring at the close of the fifty-fifth session in 2022:  Burkina Faso and Mauritania (African States), Bangladesh, China and Vanuatu (Asia-Pacific States); Bulgaria and the Russian Federation (Eastern European States); Argentina, Colombia and Haiti (Latin American and Caribbean States); and the United States (Western European and Other States).  It postponed the election of two members from the African States, one member from the Asia-Pacific States and two members from the Western European and Other States.

The Council also elected by acclamation Canada and Denmark (Western European and Other States), filling outstanding seats, for a term beginning on the date of election and expiring at the close of the fifty-third session in 2020.  It postponed the election of three outstanding seats.

Commission on the Status of Women:  The Council elected by secret ballot 13 members to four-year terms, beginning at the first meeting of the Commission’s sixty-third session in 2018 and expiring at the close of the sixty-sixth session in 2022:  Algeria, Comoros, Congo, Ghana and Kenya (African States); Iraq, Japan, Republic of Korea, Saudi Arabia and Turkmenistan (Asia-Pacific States); and Ecuador, Haiti and Nicaragua (Latin American and Caribbean States).

Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice:  The Council elected by acclamation 16 members to three-year terms, beginning 1 January 2018 and expiring 31 December 2020.  They included Egypt, Kenya, Mauritania and Togo (African States); Afghanistan, China, Indonesia, and Japan (Asia-Pacific States); Bulgaria, and the Russian Federation (Eastern European States); Bolivia, Colombia and Uruguay (Latin American and Caribbean States); and Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom (Western European and Other States).  It postponed the election of four outstanding vacancies from the African States.

Intergovernmental Working Group of Experts on International Standards of Accounting and Reporting:  The Council elected by acclamation Côte d’Ivoire (African States), Russian Federation (Eastern European States) and Germany (Western European and Other States) for a three-year term beginning 1 January 2018.  It postponed the election of 18 outstanding vacancies, including four from the African States, three from the Asia-Pacific States, three from the Latin and Caribbean States and eight from the Western European and Other States.

The Council also elected by acclamation Belarus (Eastern European States) to fill one outstanding seat on the Intergovernmental Working Group of Experts on International Standards of Accounting and Reporting.

Executive Board of the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF):  The Council then elected by acclamation 11 candidates for a three-year term to begin on 1 January 2018:  Ghana and Sudan (African States); Republic of Korea and Turkmenistan (Asia-Pacific States); Belarus (Eastern European States); Brazil and Colombia (Latin American and Caribbean States); and Greece, Iceland, Italy and the United States (Western European and Other States).

Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees:  The Council then elected Fiji, Lithuania and Paraguay to serve on the Executive Committee.

Executive Board of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)/United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)/United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS):  The Council elected by acclamation 11 candidates to serve three-year terms beginning on 1 January 2018:  Burkina Faso and Egypt (African States); Cambodia and Saudi Arabia (Asia-Pacific States); Russian Federation (Eastern European States); Antigua and Barbuda and Brazil (Latin American and Caribbean States); and Finland, Portugal, Switzerland and the United Kingdom (Western European and Other States).

Executive Board of the World Food Programme (WFP):  The Council elected five members to serve three-year terms, beginning on 1 January 2018:  China, Guatemala, Japan, United Kingdom and Hungary, having postponed the election of a sixth member.

Commission for Social Development:  The Council elected by acclamation seven members to fill outstanding vacancies, including Congo and Senegal (African States) for a term beginning on the date of election and expiring at the close of the Commission’s fifty-eighth session in 2020.

The Council also elected by acclamation Bulgaria, Romania, and the Republic of Moldova (Eastern European States), filling, respectively, two vacancies for a term beginning on the date of election and expiring in 2021, and one vacancy beginning on the date of election and expiring in 2019.  It also elected by acclamation France and Iceland (Western European and Other States) for terms beginning on the date of election and expiring in 2021 and in 2020, respectively.

Finally, it postponed the election of two members from the Asia-Pacific States expiring at the close of the Commission’s fifty-ninth session, and three from the Western European and Other States, including two for a term expiring at the close of the fifty-ninth session in 2021 and one expiring at the close of the fifty-eighth session in 2020.

Commission on Science and Technology for Development:  The Council elected by acclamation South Africa (African States) and Mexico (Latin American and Caribbean States) to terms beginning on the date of election and expiring on 31 December 2020.  It postponed the election of one member from the Western European and Other States for the same term.

Governing Council of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat):  The Council elected by acclamation Afghanistan (Asia-Pacific States) to a term expiring on 31 December 2020.  It postponed the election of one member from the Latin American and Caribbean States for the same term, as well as six from the Western European and Other States, including two for a term expiring 31 December 2018, one expiring 31 December 2019, and three expiring 31 December 2020.

Organizational Committee of the Peacebuilding Commission:  The Council elected Sweden by acclamation for a term expiring on 31 December 2018.

Committee for Programme and Coordination:  The Council elected 13 members to be nominated for election by the General Assembly to three-year terms, beginning 1 January 2018.  They included Burkina Faso (African States); India, Iran, Japan and Pakistan (Asia-Pacific States); Belarus, Bulgaria and the Republic of Moldova (Eastern European States); Brazil, Chile and Cuba (Latin American and Caribbean States); and the United Kingdom and United States (Western European and Other States). The Council postponed the election of seven members, including three from the African States, one from the Latin American and Caribbean States and three from the Western European and Other States.

It also deferred action on two outstanding vacancies from the Western European and Other States, for terms beginning on the date of election by the General Assembly and ending, respectively, on 31 December 2017 and 2018.

Programme Coordinating Board of the Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS): The Council elected five members to serve three-year terms, beginning on 1 January 2018:  Congo (African States); Iran (Asia-Pacific States); Chile (Latin American and Caribbean States); and Australia and Finland (Western European and Other States).