During Fourth Day of Session, Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations Takes Recorded Vote, Postpones Consultative Status for Journalist Organization

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Consultative Status Recommended for 35 Organizations, Action Postponed for 32

Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals would not have been possible without the engagement of a free and independent civil society, the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations heard today, as it took a recorded vote on a contested application for special consultative status.

Following a heated exchange, the Committee failed to grant consultative status to the Committee to Protect Journalists, Inc. (United States), by a vote of 6 in favour (Greece, Guinea, Israel, Mauritania, Uruguay, United States) to 10 against (Azerbaijan, Burundi, China, Cuba, Nicaragua, Pakistan, Russian Federation, South Africa, Sudan, Venezuela), with 3 abstentions (India, Iran, Turkey).

Speaking before the vote, the representative of the United States drew attention to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which underlined the principle that every person had the right to seek information.  Given that journalists and human rights advocates risked their lives to report on issues ranging from corruption to human rights violations, she called upon Members to vote in favour.

In response, South Africa’s delegate noted that his country attached great importance to the issue, and had sponsored with the delegation of Austria a resolution on the protection of journalists.  However, the answers provided by the organization were not encouraging at all, he said, noting that he would vote against.

In a similar vein, Pakistan’s speaker acknowledged that journalists' protection was a worldwide problem.  While appreciating all efforts towards that aim, he underscored the need to pose additional questions.

Also today, the Committee had deferred the application of the Sheikh Eid Bin Mohammad Al Thani Charitable Association (Qatar), given its potential connection with terrorist organizations.  Participating as an observer State, the representative of Syria expressed concern that the organization had provided $10 million to Al-Nusra Front, Da’esh and other terrorist organizations.

Challenging that stance, the representative of Qatar insisted that “the organization has answered all the questions, and it has nothing to hide”.  Describing it as one of the best organizations in the Middle East, he emphasized that the Syrian delegation was providing wrong information to Committee members.

Echoing that sentiment, Sudan’s representative expressed regret that the Committee had not granted a consultative status to the Association which provided emergency relief and carried out various educational, awareness and cultural programs.

During the day-long meeting, the Committee recommended 35 organizations for special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, while deferring action on 32 organizations.

The 19-member Committee vets applications submitted by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), recommending general, special or roster status on the basis of such criteria as the applicant’s mandate, governance and financial regime.  Organizations enjoying general and special status can attend meetings of the Council and issue statements, while those with general status can also speak during meetings and propose agenda items.  Organizations with roster status can only attend meetings.

Action on several applications was also postponed because Committee members requested further information from the candidates about, among other items, details of their respective organizations’ projects, partners, expenditures, sources of funding and relationship with United Nations system actors.

The Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations will meet again at 10 a.m. on Friday, 27 May, to continue its work.

Special Consultative Status

The Committee recommended that the Economic and Social Council grant special consultative status to the following 35 organizations:

The Kuki Organization for Human Rights Trust (India);

Article 36 Limited (United Kingdom);

Asian Science Park Association (Republic of Korea);

Association Internationale de la Libre Pensée (France);

Avocats Sans Frontières (Belgium);

Bancroft Global Development (United States);

Blacksmith Institute Inc. (United States);

Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (United Kingdom);

Development and Relief Foundation (United States);

Digital Opportunity Trust (Canada);

Earth Island Institute Inc. (United States);

FORUT Solidaritetsaksjon for Utvikling (Norway);

Fondazione GEM (Italy);

Foundation for Sustainable Development (United States);

Fountain House, Inc. (United States);

Fundacion Vida - Grupo Ecologico Verde (Spain);

Fundación BBVA para las Microfinanzas (Spain);

Geneva Institute for Human Rights (GIHR) (Switzerland);

Global Network of Civil Society Organisations for Disaster Reduction (United Kingdom);

Horn of Africa Aid and Rehabilitation Action Network (United States);

IDEAS Centre (Switzerland);

International Association of Independent Journalists Inc. (Canada);

International Center for Work and Family (Spain);

International Organization for Promoting Public Diplomacy, Science, Education and Youth Cooperation “Eurasian Commonwealth” (Russian Federation);

Jeunesse Canada Monde - Canada World Youth (Canada);

Missing Children Global Network, Inc. (United States);

Mission des sociétés d'assurances pour la connaissance et la prévention des risques naturels (France);

Narayan Sewa Sansthan Inc. (India);

National Secular Society (United Kingdom);

Oromia Support Group in Australia Inc. (Australia);

Profesionales por la Ética (Spain);

Rural Development Institute (United States);

Sovereign Imperial and Royal House of Ghassan Inc. (United States);

and Stichting HealthNet International - Transcultural Psychosocial Organization (Netherlands).

The Committee postponed consideration of the following 32 organizations:

Society for Environment and Development (India) — as the representative of India asked for further information about the project funding.

The Leading Association Alryada for Development Studies and Human Rights (Egypt) — as the representative of South Africa asked for further information about recent activities undertaken by the organization.

VOICE (Vietnamese Overseas Initiative for Conscience Empowerment) (Philippines) — as the representative of Cuba asked for updated information about its activities and projects.

World Christian Association for Peace And Assistance Ministry International (Cameroon) — as the representative of South Africa inquired the timeline and location of its projects.

Action Sécurité Ethique Républicaines (France) — as the representative of Turkey asked for further information about the organization’s relationship with Amnesty International.

Association Consortium pour les Aires et Territoires du Patrimoine Autochtone et Communautaire (APAC) (Switzerland) — as the representative of South Africa sought further explanation about the deficit in its budget.

Assyrian Aid Society of America Inc. (United States) — as the representative of Turkey asked the organization to provide further information about its mission statement, which called for “building a structure capable of responding to unexpected crises that require immediate mobilization”.

Assyrian National Congress (United States) — as the representative of Turkey asked for an updated financial statement.

Bureau international pour le respect des droits de l'homme au Sahara Occidental (Switzerland) — as the representative of Burundi noted that the answer provided by the organization was not satisfactory and asked for verifiable information.

Child Soldiers International (United Kingdom) — as the representative of India asked for further information about a research undertaken by the organization.  He also asked whether it had carried out any activities in India.  The representative of South Africa asked for an updated financial statement.

Committee to Protect Journalists, Inc. (United States) — as the representative of South Africa noted that the organization’s answers were not adequate.

Stating that she did not share that view, the representative of the United States noted that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights reiterated the principle that every person had the right to seek information.  Journalists and human rights advocates risked their lives to report on issues such as corruption, human rights violations and terrorism, she said, calling for a vote to grant a consultative status to that organization.

The representative of Greece, drawing attention to continuous attacks against journalists, encouraged Committee members to vote in favour.

Responding, the representative of South Africa noted that he had been misunderstood.  His country always attached great importance to the issue, and in fact, with the delegation of Austria, had sponsored a resolution on the protection of journalists.  Citing an example, he regretted that the French satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* had been attacked by terrorists.  However, the answers provided by the organization were not encouraging at all and, therefore, he would vote against.

The representative of the Russian Federation said freedom was a universal notion, and stressed the need to ask additional questions to the organization in order to maintain consensus in the Committee.

The representative of Pakistan acknowledged that journalists' protection was a worldwide problem.  While appreciating all efforts towards that aim, he underscored the need to pose additional questions.

The Committee to Protect Journalists, Inc. was a politicized organization, said the representative of Sudan, calling upon all to vote against to grant a consultative status.

A recorded vote was then taken in which, by a vote of 6 in favour (Greece, Guinea, Israel, Mauritania, Uruguay, United States) to 10 against (Azerbaijan, Burundi, China, Cuba, Nicaragua, Pakistan, Russian Federation, South Africa, Sudan, Venezuela), with 3 abstentions (India, Iran, Turkey), the Committee failed to grant a consultative status to the Committee to Protect Journalists, Inc.

Making a general statement, the representative of the United States noted that the world leaders had come together and adopted 17 Sustainable Development Goals in September 2015.  It was not possible to achieve such goals without the engagement of a free and independent civil society, she stressed.

Coptic Solidarity (United States) — as the representative of South Africa asked for clarification about its activities and programmes in Egypt.

ELIGE Red de Jóvenes por los Derechos Sexuales y Reproductivos, A.C. (Mexico) — as the representative of Nicaragua asked for an updated financial statement.

Europe Business Assembly Limited (United Kingdom) — as the representative of China said the organization’s website did not use the correct name for Taiwan, and asked for correction.

European Network on Independent Living, Ltd. (Ireland) — as the representative of South Africa noted that Africa was a continent of 54 countries.  She asked the organization to correct the mistake on its application.

Fondazione Proclade Internazionale – Onlus (Italy) — as the representative of South Africa asked for further information about the projects carried out in Africa.

Global Institute for Water, Environment and Health (Switzerland) — as the representative of Turkey asked for further information about the organization’s counterparts in her country.

Sheikh Eid Bin Mohammad Al Thani Charitable Association (Qatar); the representative of Sudan expressed support to the organization’s application as it provided emergency relief to people suffering from natural disasters and conflicts.  In addition, it carried out various educational, awareness and cultural programs.

The representative of Iran underscored the need to allocate additional time to examine the application, and asked the organization to provide further information about its upcoming projects and activities.

The representative of Sudan expressed regret that the Committee did not grant a consultative status to that organization given its valuable work.

The representative of Syria, participating as an observer State, noted that the organization had provided $10 million to Al-Nusra Front, Da’esh and other terrorist organizations.  It was well documented that it was teaching Wahhabism to young Syrians in neighbouring countries.  He then asked the representatives of Sudan and Mauritania to provide information about its activities in their countries.

Also participating as an observer State, the representative of Qatar noted that since its creation in 1996, the organization had engaged in development, humanitarian and educational activities at the national, regional and international level.  In fact, it was one of the best organizations in the Middle East region.  “The organization has answered all the questions, and it has nothing to hide”, he emphasized.  The Syrian regime continued to perpetrate terrorism and had put the region in danger, he said, decrying that its delegation was providing wrong information to Members.

The representative of Turkey noted that it was another attempt to divert public attention from what was happening in the field.  She noted that her country was against the politicization of the Committee.

Global Network of Sex Work Projects Limited (United Kingdom) — as the representative of Nicaragua asked for further information about its activities in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Institute for Multi-track Diplomacy (United States) — as the representative of China asked for an updated financial statement.

International Association for Hospice and Palliative Care, Inc. (United States) — as the representative of Sudan asked for further information about the organization’s members in the Middle East.

International Gulf Organization FZ-LLC (Switzerland) — as the representative of China inquired the organization’s participation in human rights conferences in the United Nations Office at Geneva.

James Madison University (United States) — as the representative of China asked for further information about the activities undertaken by the organization in the Asia-Pacific region.

The representative of South Africa asked whether it dealt with issues related to nuclear armament and landmines.

Karlen Communications (Canada) — as the representative of South Africa asked for clarification about whether it was an NGO or a business.

Let's Breakthrough, Inc. (United States) — as the representative of China asked for further information about its sources of income.

Mouvement de la Paix (France) – as the representative of China requested additional information pertaining to the Group’s efforts in cutting budgets of the military.

Muslim Aid (United Kingdom) - as the representative of United States requested additional information on the sources of funding for the programmes targeting women, children and those of the lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender community.

Parents and Friends of Ex-Gays and Gays, Inc. (P-FOX) (United States) – as the representative of Israel requested elaboration on specific activities done in the past year.  The answer so far had been “generic”.

The representative of the Russian Federation said that he supported the right of all delegations to ask questions, he recalled yesterday’s meeting in which several delegations had voiced concern that non-governmental organizations not be overwhelmed by so many quires.  Muslim Aid, which had presented its credentials for four years in a row, had been postponed by yet another question.  “We have to have respect for all,” he said, emphasizing the importance of avoiding double standards when it came to the process of granting status.

Population Matters (United Kingdom) – as the representative of Nicaragua requested more information about the organization’s work.

Stichting Samenwerkingsverband IKV - Pax Christi (Netherlands) as the representative of Nicaragua requested more information on recent projects.

The representative of the Netherlands, participating as an observer State, said that it was important to “hear the voice” of civil society as they usually represented the voiceless.  He stated his belief that this particular organization was aligned with the principles and values of the United Nations and requested the Committee to consider it in a speedy matter and grant it status soon.

Stichting War Child (Netherlands) — as the representative of Venezuela requested projected initiatives carried out in South America, specifically in Colombia.

The representative of the Netherlands, participating as an observer State, said the organization was fully aligned with the principles of the United Nations and that he would recommend it accreditation.

Strong Hearted Native Women's Coalition, Inc. (United States) — as the representative of South Africa said there was still an outstanding request on financial statements.

Interactive Discussion

During the question-and-answer session, the representative of Conselho Indigenista Missionario (CIMI) (Brazil) said his group had been established in 1972 and had worked with another indigenous organization to promote the rights of those people in the country, including indigenous people isolated in the Amazon.  Education was critical for those populations in order to access healthcare, skill training and basic human rights.  He said there had been an error in the funding figures previously distributed and said that the clarified and corrected budget was now available to delegates.  He also provided additional detail of his group’s international sources of funding, underlining that it had not received any grants or financial support from the Brazilian Government.  The group had also provided China with the information it had previously requested.

The representative of South Africa said it was “truly appreciated” that the organization provided the requested information.

The Committee then granted special consultative status to the Conselho Indigenista Missionario (CIMI).

The representative of Ambedkar Center for Justice and Peace (India) said that his group’s board had “many distinguished members from various walks of life”.  The organization had been named after B. R. Ambedkar, an architect of India’s constitution, he said, adding that “[Mr. Ambedkar] wanted social economic revolution without bloodshed.”  Today 300 million Indians remained marginalized and underprivileged.  The Ambedkar Center for Justice and Peace was working to empower thousands of children by distributing scholarships, developing skills and building capacity.  It had been engaged in educating young people on human rights whilst interacting with relevant national ministries and international organizations.

The representative of India requested the group to clarify in writing what it meant by “working for India’s indigenous people”.

The group’s representative said he would provide the clarification in writing.

The Committee then decided to postpone its consideration of the organization.