

Letter addressed to Louise Arbour
Copied to: Bacre Ndiaye,
Eric Tistounet
Laura Dolci-Kanaan

Subject: URGENT request for extension of deadline for NGO submissions to the first session of the Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review

Dear High Commissioner,

We thank your Office for the information provided in the Information Note on UPR sent to NGOs on October 8 2007. We are writing to raise some concerns relating to the deadline announced for submission by NGOs (30 October).

While we understand the constraints that your Office will face in the preparation of the documentation of the first cycle of the UPR, we believe that for NGO participation in this process to be meaningful, it needs to be inclusive, coordinated, focused and timely. This will be made very difficult by the deadline of 30 October 2007.

During one of the NGO briefings held during the 6th session of the Human Rights Council, the Council Secretariat announced 30 October as the deadline for NGO submissions for the first UPR session because it was scheduled to take place in February 2008. Given that the first UPR session has been postponed until April, we recommend that the deadline for NGOs be revised accordingly.

Many NGOs based in the countries which will come under review have yet to receive information on the UPR process, how it functions and the opportunities available for NGO participation. NGOs who work closer to the Human Rights Council need to disseminate this information to other NGOs in order to start coordinating their efforts to provide well tailored inputs to the Secretariat. For many NGOs "in country" this will be their first time interacting with the Human Rights Council, or perhaps even the UN system, and therefore they will require assistance and more time to organize themselves and their submissions.

Resolution 5/1 of the Human Rights Council encourages states to prepare information through a broad consultation process at the national level. NGOs will benefit from having more time to ensure that their submissions reflect discussions and consultations which have taken place nationally and the three-week deadline will not allow for such coordination.

Similarly, the current deadline will make coordination difficult even among those NGOs that work more regularly with the Human Rights Council and that are used to coordinating their work. NGO coordination will be important including in order to limit duplication of information and /or gaps in coverage.

Furthermore, for NGO information to be relevant to the UPR process it must not be outdated. The 30 October deadline will mean that by the time a country is reviewed in April, NGO submissions will be six months old and might become less representative of the reality of the country under review.

For these reasons we urge your Office to seriously reconsider the deadline set for NGO submissions and to delay it by two months (i.e. 31 December 2007). Even within this extended time frame, it will not be easy for NGOs, but we will make our best efforts to ensure that our submissions are well coordinated, come from a broad spectrum of NGOs at the national, regional and international level and are well tailored to the UPR process.

We look forward to your response and thank you and your staff in advance for a positive consideration of these concerns.