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Technical assistance and capacity-building

Written statement* submitted by Elizka Relief Foundation, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[03 February 2020]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.

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Strengthening the civil space in voluntary national reviews of the sustainable development goals

Eritrea's model

Introduction

Despite the importance of the role of civil society organizations in advancing the development and human rights process in general within the state, many governments have overlooked that great importance, as the existence of civil society, within all international mechanisms, is strengthened, especially those related to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with its 17 goals, 169 objectives and 230 indicators, is targeted for preserving human rights in the world, as each of its goals is linked with one of the fundamental human rights.¹ International mechanisms for sustainable development are also linked, directly and indirectly, with the international mechanisms for human rights, the most important of which is the universal periodic review, which is the mechanism operating within the Human Rights Council with the aim of improving the human rights reality and creating an appropriate climate for achieving the goals of sustainable development as part of human rights, where countries review their achievements in sustainable development.²

Freedom of Civil Society in Eritrea and its impact on sustainable development

The work of civil society and the rights to the freedoms of association in Eritrea are subject to all forms of restrictions, as there is no governmental organization operating independently within the state. This is in addition to the continued operation of Law No. 145/2005 relating to civil society organizations, which constitutes a clear obstacle to the work of these organizations in terms of the registration process and the nature of their activities. Therefore, the organization is obliged to submit a request to the concerned authorities in the country about the organization and the purpose of its establishment. The work of that organization falls clearly under government surveillance, in terms of periodic reports that the organization must submit to the state, in addition to submitting information reports about the nature of the organization's workers, especially if they were foreigners. The government also obliges the organization to pay a tax on the income earned from work, and all assets of organizations working in relief and rehabilitation must be transferred to the Ministry of Labor and Human Welfare.³

The law also still requires civil society organizations to undergo an exhausting and arbitrary annual registration process, restricting their activities to providing humanitarian relief. The government continues to deny access to outside human rights organizations to enter the country. There are also no independent trade unions in Eritrea. The only union umbrella group, the National Confederation of Eritrean Workers, is affiliated with the ruling party. The government continues to prevent the formation of new unions.

From this standpoint, "Elzika Foundation for Relief" expresses its concern about the obstruction of this law for the existence of a strong civil society playing its role in achieving sustainable development. What makes this role difficult is the lack of independent local media outlets playing this alternative role for civil society, whether in monitoring, surveillance or follow-up.

¹ <https://bit.ly/2U7hX3w> للاضطلاع علي المزيد من الأهداف الخاصة بأجندة 2030 انظر الرابط التالي:

² أهداف التنمية المستدامة وحقوق الإنسان ، برنامج الأمم المتحدة الإنمائي في الدول العربية ، أكتوبر 2017 ، لمزيد من التفاصيل انظر الرابط التالي: <https://bit.ly/313ZyWv>

³ *Eritrea: Proclamation No. 145/2005 of 2005, Non-governmental Organization Administration Proclamation*, 11 May 2005 available at: <https://bit.ly/3aZdjL1>

Eritrea's position on the sustainable development goals

The High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) is the international body charged with following up and reviewing processes for the sustainable development plan. Ministers, governments, civil society organizations, private sector and stakeholders, all assemble and come together in this forum to assess success and discuss challenges facing sustainable development in the world.⁴ During the extended debate on the agenda, as well as by submitting voluntary reports on sustainable development in the country concerned.⁵ It is the space where civil society can participate to assist the state to write its voluntary reports, and then present, evaluate, and monitor them, and to contribute with submitting recommendations that the government can implement.

But in reality, the deteriorating civil society situation in Eritrea affects the course of the sustainable development agenda in general. As we find that Eritrea is among the countries where the indicators of sustainable development decline significantly. In the case of mentioning some developments relating to sustainable development, it may be dominated by a lack of transparency or realism due to the absence of an important and influential element, which is civil society organizations.

It is mentioned that, since 2015, starting from the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the country has not submitted any national reports on its achievements in the sustainable development goals, which is one of various ways to promote human rights within the country and one of the most active areas in which the state can cooperate with the United Nations bodies. To date, the country has not announced its participation in the upcoming forum activities in 2020.

It should be noted that if the state continues to deal with civil society as a "mean of demolition", and if it continues to question and reject the works of human rights organizations, the decline in rights, in all its forms, will continue. The participation of the State of Eritrea in the universal periodic review in its last session, was a sign of cooperation with the international mechanisms, as well as the country's openness to end the escalation of Eritrea's years-long conflict with its neighbor Ethiopia, leading to the escalation of indicators of the sixteenth goal of peace, justice and strong institutions. This point, at which the Eritrean government opens up to achieve the principle of integrated partnership and good governance in cooperation internally with civil society, can be used as a tool to assist and improve human rights and development conditions, not the other way around.

Recommendations

Elzika Foundation for Relief makes a number of recommendations in this regard:

- Repealing Law No. 145/2005 regarding civil society work and allowing all national institutions to participate in human rights work.
- Including the 2030 agenda within national strategies and increasing the number of civil society organizations within the country, operating in the field of sustainable development in general.
- Raising awareness on the important role of civil society organizations in voluntary national reviews of the SDGs.
- Allow civil society organizations to participate in UN and regional bodies and reviews concerned with sustainable development and human rights to ensure that the principles of transparency and participatory are represented.

Comply with all UN mechanisms for sustainable development, such as the high-level political forum.

⁴ <https://bit.ly/2S2sUkh> للمزيد من التفاصيل عن المنتدى انظر الرابط التالي :

⁵ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/vnrs/> للمزيد من التفاصيل عن التقرير الطوعي للتنمية المستدامة