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Revitalization of the work of the General Assembly

Letter dated 21 May 2021 from the Permanent Representatives of Costa Rica and Denmark to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

The Permanent Missions of Costa Rica and Denmark to the United Nations have the honour to transmit, with the endorsement of 52 Member States and of 264 civil society organizations, a list of concrete recommendations on how the United Nations can further ensure meaningful civil society participation at the United Nations (see annex I).

The list of Member States and civil society organizations that have endorsed those recommendations can be found in annex II.

We would like to take this opportunity to express sincere gratitude for your leadership in these challenging times and extend our support for your call to action for human rights, emphasizing the central role of human rights in seven key areas.

We commend your attention, *inter alia*, to civic space and the participation of civil society at the United Nations, as one of your seven identified areas for positive change. In the light of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, this is as important as ever.

Ensuring the meaningful participation of all relevant stakeholders, including civil society, is crucial in our efforts to build back better from the crisis. Different stakeholders, not least civil society, represent a diverse range of expertise, perspectives and lived experiences and play a critical role in achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the promise of “leaving no one behind”.

Considering this, Denmark and Costa Rica, with the support of UN Foundation, CIVICUS, Global Focus, Action for Sustainable Development, ActionAid International and Forus International – and with the endorsement of 52 Member States and 264 civil society organizations – are pleased to share with you this list of recommendations. Our aim is that the attached recommendations provide valuable contributions, in supplement to your ongoing efforts, to the enhancement of the meaningful and inclusive participation of civil society at the United Nations. We stand ready to dedicate our efforts, under your leadership, to contributing to their implementation.



We request that the present letter and its annexes be circulated as a document of the seventy-fifth session of the General Assembly, under agenda item 126.

(Signed) Martin Bille **Hermann**
Permanent Representative of Denmark to the United Nations

(Signed) Rodrigo A. **Carazo**
Permanent Representative of Costa Rica to the United Nations

Annex I to the letter dated 21 May 2021 from the Permanent Representatives of Costa Rica and Denmark to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Recommendations for ensuring meaningful civil society participation at the United Nations: from ambition to action

Prepared by the Permanent Missions of Denmark and Costa Rica to the United Nations, UN Foundation, CIVICUS, Action for Sustainable Development, Global Focus, ActionAid International and Forus International, with the endorsement of 52 member states and 264 civil society members (see annex II).

I. Introduction

The opening words of the Charter of the United Nations clearly state that the United Nations is not the preserve of States and Governments alone, but of “We the peoples”. Justice to that promise implies broad stakeholder participation to ensure that the voice of everyone is heard – including the most vulnerable and marginalized. Civil society organizations represent a diverse range of expertise, perspectives and lived experiences and play a valuable role in bringing insight to strengthen the basis of policymaking.

Over the past 75 years, the United Nations has benefited from and relied on cooperation with Member States and civil society to design better multilateral treaties, frameworks and mechanisms for democratic governance. Individuals and groups engaging with the United Nations provide valuable on-the-ground insight and information, alert the United Nations system about evolving situations and push for relevant action to be taken.

The United Nations, as a whole, has the collective responsibility to respect, protect and promote the freedom to engage with it in the exercise of fundamental freedoms and human rights for all.

In the Secretary-General’s call to action for human rights,¹ public participation and civic space is identified as one of seven key areas in a blueprint for positive change that reaffirms the promise of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in which it was established that the pursuit of fundamental rights and freedoms is at the core of the work of the United Nations.

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has only made the need to deliver on that promise more acute. At the same time, with regard to its working modalities during and beyond the pandemic, the United Nations should endeavour to create an opportunity for building back better and to embed into our new working methods improved participation of all stakeholders, not least civil society.

II. Recommendations

On the basis of extensive action-oriented discussions between Member States and civil society on lessons learned and opportunities for strengthening meaningful participation, we wish to provide the following recommendations as a non-exhaustive, but committed, exercise for supporting and building on United Nations efforts.

¹ See www.un.org/en/content/action-for-human-rights/index.shtml.

1. Maximize the opportunities for and advantages of information and communication technologies and digitalization in United Nations meetings and processes

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) have shown their value in broadening participation and engagement for different stakeholders, and the use of digital technologies and virtual meetings at the United Nations over the past year presented opportunities and challenges that the United Nations, Member States and civil society should seize and harness.

An evaluation survey² of participation in the high-level political forum convened by the General Assembly in 2020 by major groups and other stakeholders showed that almost 50 per cent of participants surveyed had joined the political forum for the first time in 2020. Most of those new participants represented civil society from developing countries.

While evidence shows the opportunities that virtual formats offer for broader participation in United Nations meetings and processes, in particular from developing countries, ensuring inclusive virtual meetings implies taking into consideration such issues as access to the Internet, language barriers, time zones and safety, which should be assessed in a more integrated manner.

Building on lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond, the United Nations should consider how to best combine inclusive virtual and physical formats in meetings and processes, namely, during the high-level week and meetings of the annual session of the General Assembly, the high-level political forum, Human Rights Council processes, the Economic and Social Council and its functional commissions and Conference of the Parties meetings.

Efforts to maximize the advantages of ICTs should build upon and complement ongoing work to strengthen modalities for civil society inclusion and participation at the United Nations, such as the Secretary-General's call to action for human rights or the United Nations guidance note on the protection and promotion of civic space.

2. Bridge the digital divide

To harness the potential of digital inclusion, we must bridge the digital divide to promote a more open and inclusive civic space by addressing the disparities in usage and access to digital tools. This is critical to ensure stable and reliable access and opportunities for engagement for everyone, including those living in rural areas, women, young people, persons with disabilities and indigenous peoples.

The United Nations can lead by example in adopting an integrated and system-wide approach through the facilitation of Internet access and connectivity for civil society to engage virtually in United Nations meetings and sessions. One option could be to utilize a connection at United Nations country-based offices.

Bridging the digital divide, including the gender digital divide, is a challenging task that requires the contribution of all stakeholders, as different factors must be considered to ensure accessibility, such as diverse language interpretation, attention to time zones, closed captioning and sign language options, in addition to other social, political or economic barriers that need to be tackled in parallel. Until those gaps are fully overcome, the United Nations should seek to expand the participation of civil

² A survey on the inclusion of civil society in the virtual high-level political forum convened by the General Assembly in 2020 was prepared by Action for Sustainable Development and conducted in August 2020 and included 130 responses from 48 countries, with responses from all recognized stakeholder groups.

society, creatively, by all available means and in close consultation with civil society, so as to identify and overcome the barriers to their full and effective participation.

3. Ensure meaningful participation in all stages of United Nations meetings and processes

Dialogue and discussions between Member States and civil society have shown that, beyond the need to review civil society participation in formal modalities of the work of the United Nations, there are concrete opportunities for better integrating the voices of civil society to the benefit of United Nations processes, namely:

(a) To ensure real interactive dialogue during and in the preparation of and follow-up to official sessions

The United Nations should revise the modalities for meaningful civil society participation and engagement across the spectrum of official meetings and sessions through a United Nations system-wide and integrated approach, including in the preparation thereof and follow-up thereto.

Moreover, with regard to official sessions, more creative ways could be sought for engaging with and across participants, including civil society, to ensure a meaningful dialogue and inputs from all relevant stakeholders, for instance, by harnessing the potential of digital technologies in the crowdsourcing of ideas to capture broader views.

(b) To facilitate procedural conditions for effective engagement

The United Nations should facilitate appropriate conditions to allow effective civil society participation in official meetings and sessions.

This can be accomplished, inter alia, through improving access to information, in which digital technologies can play a significant role; ensuring proper notice and information of United Nations meetings and timely civil society registration; and allowing members of civil society, especially from developing countries, to have adequate time to obtain travel documents and make travel arrangements.

The United Nations and its Member States can also seek opportunities to allow substantive civil society engagement in the preparation phases, for instance, by formally recognizing independent civil society reports in intergovernmental processes, including the high-level political forum and voluntary national review processes, following the example of the universal periodic review of the Human Rights Council.

(c) To create an annual civil society action day to be held in the margins of the high-level political forum or the high-level week or annual session of the General Assembly

An annual “civil society action day”, to be held in the margins of the high-level political forum or the high-level week or annual session of the General Assembly, could serve as a space for accountability, review and stocktaking of ongoing efforts to strengthen the role of civil society at the United Nations. This could be a forum co-created by the United Nations, Member States and civil society, held virtually or by combining virtual and physical elements, for broad and in-depth dialogue on how to strengthen the role of civil society within all three pillars of the work of the United Nations, including ensuring a human rights-based approach to sustainable development.

4. Appoint an envoy on civil society to work for civic space at the United Nations

Inspired by the impressive work done by the Envoy of the Secretary-General on Youth, it is the recommendation of Member States and civil society that the Secretary-

General look into the possibility of appointing an envoy for civil society, specifically tasked to support inclusive, meaningful and consistent civil society participation across the United Nations, including in United Nations processes and meetings, through integrated and comprehensive approaches. This would require the appointed envoy to collaborate closely with civil society, including international and regional networks, as well as other civil society coordinating mechanisms; engage in conversations with Member States; support United Nations efforts to further advance the conditions that allow civil society to meaningfully participate; and ensure that a civil society perspective is secured in contexts and intergovernmental forums with restricted access for civil society, by collaborating closely with relevant partners in the United Nations Secretariat and United Nations mechanisms, departments and agencies.

Annex II to the letter dated 21 May 2021 from the Permanent Representatives of Costa Rica and Denmark to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

The following 52 Member States have endorsed the recommendations:

Albania	Latvia
Andorra	Lebanon
Australia	Liechtenstein
Austria	Lithuania
Belgium	Luxembourg
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Malta
Bulgaria	Mexico
Canada	Montenegro
Chile	Netherlands
Costa Rica	New Zealand
Croatia	Norway
Czech Republic	Panama
Cyprus	Poland
Denmark	Portugal
Estonia	Qatar
Finland	Republic of Korea
France	Romania
Georgia	San Marino
Germany	Slovakia
Greece	Slovenia
Hungary	Spain
Iceland	Sweden
Ireland	Switzerland
Israel	Tunisia
Italy	United Kingdom
Jordan	United States

The following 264 civil society organizations have endorsed the recommendations:

Abundant Grace Female Foundation	Campaign For Increased Awareness
Access Now	CAN South Asia
Action aid association	CEMS SOCIETY NGO
ActionAid Denmark	center for education and communication
ActionAid International	Center for social and labor rights
Advocates for Youth	Centre de défense des Droits de l'Homme et
afifa foundation	Démocratie
Africa Sex Workers Alliance	Centre for Citizens Conserving (CECIC)
African Coalition on Green Growth	Centre for Disaster Risk and Crisis Reduction
Afrihealth Optonet Association	Centre for Environment, Human Rights &
Aidsfonds	Development Forum -CEHRDF
Alf Ba Civilian & Coexistence Foundation	Centre for health and Resource management
Amis des Étrangers au Togo: ADET	Centre for Health Science and Law (CHSL), a
AMIS. A More Including Society	non-profit public interest CSO
Angels in the Field	Centre for social equity and inclusion (CSEI)
Arab Foundation for Freedoms and Equality (AFE)	CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE LIVING FOR
Arambh	PEACE (CYPLP)
Arkansas Disability Coalition	Children And Youth For PEACE AGENCY - SIERRA
Asociación de Desarrollo Sostenible LGTBI Costa Rica	LEONE (CYPA-SL)
Association des Femmes de l'Europe Méridionale AFEM	Christian Blind Mission
Association des Jeunes pour le Progrès de Herico (AJEPH)	Citizens' Alliance for Democracy Ethics and
Association for Progressive Communications	Transparency in Governance (CADET)
Association For Promotion Sustainable Development	Civil Society Platform for Peacebuilding and
ASSOCIATION FOR SINGLE MOTHERS	Statebuilding (CSPPS)
ASSOCIATION GABON INITIATIVES JEUNESSE	Climate Action Network
Association Montessori Internationale	CMI! Consortium comprised of Mama Cash, CREA,
ASSOCIATION OF WORLD CITIZENS	JASS, AWID, UAF-Africa, UAF, Red Umbrella
Association pour l'Integration et le Developpement Durable au Burundi, AIDB (Indigenous Forum in special consultative status with the UN ECOSOC)	Fund and Wo=Men
Association Proyecto Hombre	CNCD-11.11.11
Asuntos del Sur	Coalition for the UN We Need
ATHENA Network	Community Development Initiative
Australian Injecting & Illicit Drug Users League	CONEYSO
Autistic Minority International	Coordinación de ONG y Cooperativas CONGCOOP
Awadh Youth Collective	CSEND
Awaken Resistance Singapore Non-Profit Drugs-Based Community Movement	Dakshayani and Amaravati Health and Education
Azm Addiction and Psychological Treatment Centre Sargodha	DALIT EAVM ADIVASI VIKASH PRISHAD
Baha'i International Community	DANMU
Bangladesh NGOs Network for Radio & Communication (BNNRC)	DECA, EQUIPO PUEBLO, AC
Banka BioLoo	Delta Cultural Initiative DCI-WORLDWIDE
Beyond Beijing Committee (BBC) Nepal	Democracy Without Borders
Bina Foundation-Nigeria	Development Alternatives
Bioescape International Corporation	Development Initiative for Community Impact
BMJ	Dianova International
BOLCRIS INTERNATIONAL	Disability Rights Fund
Cameroon Active Youth Association	Discourage Youths From Poverty
Cameroon for a World Beyond War	Diverse International Trader
	Dr Uzo Adirieje Foundation (DUZAFFOUND)
	DynamicTransit Llc
	EKAL NARI SHAKTI SAGHTAN
	Elpida Consultant
	Embrace Relief
	Emony Yefwe International
	Equality Rights Alliance

Ethiopian Society for Public Administration & Management	Institute of Intellectual Property of Albania
European Union Civil Society Forum on Drugs	Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary - Loreto Generalate
Family Health Options Kenya	Instituto Federal de Educação, Ciência e Tecnologia do Ceará - Campus Fortaleza
Family Planning NSW	International Academy of Science, Health & Ecology
Fingo	International Alliance of Women
FOKUS - Forum for Women and Development	International Association of Applied Psychology
Fondation Eboko	International Diabetes Federation
Fondazione LILA Milano - Italian League for Fighting AIDS	International Movement for Advancement of Education Culture Social & Economic Development (IMAECSED)
Forus	International NGO Forum on Indonesian Development
Fridays for Future Ecuador, Unite for Climate Action	International Planned Parenthood Federation Western Hemisphere Region (IPPFWHR)
Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung New York Office	International Women's Health Coalition
Fundación Colectivo Hombres XX, A. C.	International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA)
Futureshot Factory	International Young Leaders Organization IYLO
Gatef organization	International Youth Alliance for Peace
Global Focus	Intersectoral Forum to Fight NCDs in Brazil (ForumDCNTs)
Global Humaniste	IPPF
Global Network of Civil Society Organisations for Disaster Reduction (GNDR)	ISHR
Global Network of Sex Work Projects (NSWP)	ISIZIBA Community Based Organizations of South Africa
Global Socio-Economic and Financial Evolution Network (GSFEN)	Jana Swasthya Abhiyan/Bharat Gyan Vigyan Samiti
Grameen Development Society (GDS)	Karang taruna kedungdalem
GraminPunarnirman Sansthan	Keen and Care Initiative (KCI), Nigeria
Greenpeace International	Kijiji Yeetu
Haakro Welfare Association	Kikandwa Environmental Association
Halley Movement Coalition	Kiribati Scout Association
HaritaDhara Research Development and Education Foundation	KURS (www.kurs2030.ru)
Harm Reduction Australia	LGBT+ Denmark
Haven Initiative	Liberian United To Promote Society Safety And Development
Hawai'i Institute for Human Rights	Make Mothers Matter (MMM)
Healthy India alliance	MenEngage Global Alliance
Heart to Heart Foundation	MGCY
HOPE WORLDWIDE-PAKISTAN	Migrant Service
HOUSE OF AFRICA	Mindset development initiative
Ibtikar for Empowerment and Social Entrepreneurship	MY World Mexico
ICASO	NA
ICED Burundi	Nanny Africa
IMPACT-NIGERIA	National Association of Youth Organizations (NAYO)
Independent	National Campaign for Sustainable Development Nepal
Independent Advocacy Projects/Women for Peace and Unity Growth Initiative	National Coalition of Civil Society Organizations of Liberia
Independent freelancer individual named Hitesh BHATT-india	New York University, Center on International Cooperation
Independent Nonprofit Organisation for Advancement of Science, Education and Culture "Socrat"	NGO Committee on Sustainable Development-NY
Indigenous Peoples Global Forum for Sustainable Development, IPGFforSD (International Indigenous Platform)	NGO: Amis des Etrangers au Togo:ADET
Indigenous Peoples' Major Group for Sustainable Development-IPMG	Nigeria Network of NGOs
Individual	Nirantar Trust
Inspirator Muda Nusantara	Nordjysk Fødevareoverskud
Institute of Cultural Affairs-Benin	

Nouveau Point Vue	Stichting Mission Lanka
Nyt Europa	Stimson Center's Global Governance, Justice and Security Program
ong as charmosas facebook	STRETCHCENTER For Human Development
Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd (RGS)	Studio D - Centre for Development and Dialogue
Our Lady of Perpetual Help Initiative (OLPHI)	TeamcobyNigeria
OutRight Action International	The African Women's Network for Community management of Forests
PA ARD "Habitat"	The Bolivian Women's Efforts: Local contributions for a safer world
Pallisa Civil society Organisation network	The Community Human Rights Defenders Network - ACPDH
PANI	The Danish Family Planning Association
Panos Institute Southern Africa	The International Legal Foundation
Parlement des Jeunes Leaders de la Société Civile Guinéenne	The Red-Green Alliance
Patient Academy for Innovation and Research	The WaterBear Network
PEER NETWORK OF USERS OF PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES	Together First
Peoples' Vigilance Committee on Human Rights (PVCHR)	Tripla Difesa Onlus ODV
Plan International	Trippinz Care International Foundatio
Plataforma CIPÓ	Trust in God Organization (NGO)
POSITIVE VOICE (GREEK ASSOCIATION OF PLWHIV)	UHAI-Eastern African Sexual Health and Rights Initiative (UHAI EASHRI)
Poverty Reduction Forum Trust	Union des Amis Socio Culturels d'Action en Developpement (UNASCAD)
Povod, Slovenia	UNITE 2030
Prime Goals Initiative	united Reformers Organization
Reacción Climática	Unity Earth
REACHOUT SALONE	University Student Chamber International
Red por los Derechos Humanos de Niñas, Niños y Adolescentes, REDHNNNA	Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights
Regional Centre for International Development Cooperation (RCIDC)	Uso Inteligente ASV AC
Relief action international	vasundhara seva samiti kalyanpur
RFSU	Viernes por el Futuro (FFF)/Unite for Climate Action
RIHRDO (Rural Infrastructure and Human Resource Development Organization)	Wabco India Pvt Ltd
RIPO Perú CUSCO	Wada Na Todo Abhiyan
Rutare Initiative	Watchman Relief Association Global
Rutgers	WO=MEN Dutch Gender Platform
SAHAYOG	Women & Child Welfare Society
San Patrignano	Women and Harm Reduction International Network
Sex og Politikk (IPPF Norway)	Women Engage for a Common Future
Sisters of Charity Federation	Women's Coalition Against Cancer - WOCACA
Social Research & Evaluation Pty Limited	World Family Organization
Society for Conservation and Sustainability of Energy and Environment in Nigeria (SOCSEEN)	World Federation for Animals
Solari Skills And Entrepreneurship Development Centre	World Federation of United Nations Associations
Soroptimist International	World Yoga Community
SOUTHERN AFRICA CLIMATE CHANGE COALITION	WORLDLITE
SSSIO INGO	WPDA
	YAPPIKA-ActionAid Indonesia
	Youth for Community Academic and Development Services (YOCADS)
	Youth Leaders Stakeholders
	Zimbabwe Climate Change Coalition
