

4th Session of the UN Human Rights Council

Joint Oral Intervention

Lutheran World Federation, International Movement against all forms of Discrimination and Racism, Pax Romana, Minority Rights Group International

Item 2: Implementation of the GA 60 / 251

Thank you Mr. President, I speak on behalf of Pax Romana, Lutheran World Federation, IMADR and Minority Rights Group International.

In order to make appropriate decisions, it is important that the Human Rights Council hears a variety of voices, and non-governmental organizations can help to ensure that those voices are heard. NGOs have played an important role in the work of the Commission on Human Rights and its subsidiary bodies, providing expertise on a wide variety of specific topics. It is important that participation of NGOs is maintained and enhanced in the ongoing discussions on institutional building.

In this respect we wish to recall that General Assembly Resolution 60/251 provides that "participation of and consultation with observers, including ... non-governmental organizations, shall be based on arrangements ... and practices observed by the Commission on Human Rights".

In its practices, the Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights has been a leader in the field of NGO participation in general. Its establishment of subsidiary bodies was successful in bringing more diverse voices to the United Nations. The Working Groups on Minorities, Indigenous Populations, Slavery and the Social Forum provided a forum to hear from NGOs speaking on behalf of special groups. These include NGOs that do not have ECOSOC status.

While the ECOSOC status system is an important one in ensuring legitimacy and quality of NGO input, these working groups showed that in specific cases, where there is a need to hear the voices of people from certain special groups, it is useful to have a where non-ECOSOC NGOs can participate. In particular, this has enabled the increasing participation of national-level NGOs from developing countries.

We would like to recall the following relevant practices developed through the Working Groups of the Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights:

- The Working Group on Indigenous Populations has been open to all representatives of indigenous peoples and their communities and organisations regardless of their ECOSOC status.
- The Working Group on Minorities, adopted the same practice as the WGIP, and allowed the participation by those groups with or without ECOSOC status, which identify themselves as a minority group, as well as academics specialized in minority issues.
- The oldest of the working groups, the Working Group on Contemporary Forms of Slavery, also adopted those practices in 1998, when it started to facilitate participation in its sessions of former victims of prostitution and trafficking, and NGOs working to assist victims, regardless of their ECOSOC status.
- The newest body of the Sub-Commission, the Social Forum, maintains the principle of open access to civil society.

The engagement with non-ECOSOC status NGOs through the Working Groups of the Sub-Commission is a special part of the Human Rights Council's inheritance in this regard. We call upon members of the Council to ensure that such flexible and effective modalities are also included in the expert advisory system of the Human Rights Council.