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## RELATIONS WITH NON-GOVERNMENTAL PARTNERS

### STUDY ON MECHANISMS AND PRACTICES FOR INTERACTION WITH NGOS IN THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM AND SIMILAR ORGANIZATIONS

#### SUMMARY

By its decision 200 EX/Decision 23, the Executive Board requested “the Director-General, in line with 38 C/Resolution 71, and in close consultation with Member States and the NGO-UNESCO Liaison Committee, to develop proposals on how to further create opportunities for qualitative dialogue between Member States and NGOs, including within the governing bodies, drawing on best practices in other United Nations agencies and similar institutions, and to present them to it at its 202<sup>nd</sup> session with a view to transmitting them to the General Conference for consideration at its 39th session.”

This document summarizes the main findings of a mapping of practices in other United Nations agencies and similar institutions regarding interaction with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and aims at facilitating the identification of best practices on which proposals for creating further opportunities for qualitative dialogue between UNESCO’s Member States and NGOs could be based.

This document should be considered together with document 202 EX/37.



## I. INTRODUCTION

1. Pursuant to decision 200 EX/23, an initial mapping of practices in other United Nations agencies and similar institutions was carried out thanks to the human resources support of the Permanent Delegations of Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden to UNESCO. Forty (40) entities were studied: 36 were United Nations organizations, agencies, programmes or funds, whereas four represented relevant intergovernmental organizations. The mapping was mostly based on information and documentation available online, official websites and basic texts as reported therein as well as, in certain cases, consultations with the concerned organization's secretariat. Five factors were taken into account: the structure of the organization; the formal mandate given to NGOs; the extent of collaboration with civil society; the level of access to governing bodies; and the type and number of NGOs involved in the cooperation, although the number of staffers tasked with NGO engagement within an organization and the number of NGOs associated with it could not always be ascertained.

2. Without claiming to be exhaustive, this document summarizes the main findings of this mapping and aims at identifying best practices on which proposals for creating further opportunities for qualitative dialogue between UNESCO's Member States and NGOs could be based. Section II includes a short overview of the mechanisms (formal and informal) for NGO engagement within UNESCO whilst Section III provides information on other United Nations entities and similar organizations' mechanisms for NGO interaction, and Section IV provides a preliminary analysis of the findings.

3. It should be noted that *NGO (non-governmental organization)* is the acronym most commonly used to describe civil society organizations. However, different organizations may tend to offer differing interpretations of what constitutes an NGO. The acronym *INGO (International Non-Governmental Organization)* is sometimes used when the mapped organization distinguishes NGOs operating on different regional levels. Another common term is *CSO (Civil Society Organization)*, which could encompass NGOs, academia, parliamentarians, private sector, etc.

## II. UNESCO's Mechanisms for Non-Governmental Organization Engagement

4. The current official framework for civil society engagement is outlined in two main instruments: the *Directives concerning UNESCO's partnership with non-governmental organizations* (36 C/Res.108, hereafter referred to as "the 2011 Directives") and to a lesser extent the *Directives concerning UNESCO's relations with foundations and similar institutions*, adopted by the General Conference at its 29th session in 1997. In addition, the *Comprehensive Partnership Strategy* ([192 EX/5.INF](#)) defines the overall framework for partnership and separated strategies for engagement with individual categories of partners, including cooperation with NGOs.

5. Official partnership under the framework of the 2011 Directives is the privileged way of cooperation with the Organization. However, the involvement of NGOs in programme implementation does not necessarily hinge on an official partnership with the Organization and, in addition to the house-wide policy, Programme Sectors have implemented separate (formal and informal) measures to engage NGOs in their field of competence. It should be noted that there are also specific mechanisms adopted by Member States, related to cultural conventions for instance, which provide cooperation with NGOs through their own guidelines and accreditation systems.

6. The 2011 Directives outline two possible types of partnership: (1) consultative status (granted on the discretion of the Director-General and reported thereon to the Executive Board), designed to establish and maintain flexible partnerships with any civil society organization that is active in UNESCO's fields of competence at any level; and (2) associate status (granted by the Executive Board on the recommendation of the Director-General) open to international or regional organizations having maintained a continuous and effective partnership with UNESCO for at least two years.

7. The 2011 Directives provides for four modalities which are likely designed to contribute fostering dialogue between the Organization and NGOs:

- the International Conference of NGOs;
- the NGO-UNESCO Liaison Committee;
- the participation of NGOs in the governing bodies of UNESCO;
- collective consultations.

### **The International Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations**

8. The International Conference of NGOs brings together all NGOs in official partnership every two years to review the state of cooperation with UNESCO, conduct collective consultations on the main lines of UNESCO's programme and budget, and facilitate cooperation between organizations having common interests.

### **The NGO-UNESCO Liaison Committee**

9. The NGO-UNESCO Liaison Committee - elected by the International Conference of NGOs and made up of ten NGOs from all regions as defined by UNESCO – shall *inter alia* represent the interests of all NGO partners, take necessary steps to ensure the proper functioning and efficiency of the partnership between NGOs and UNESCO, ensure that NGO opinions taken collectively are reflected by UNESCO in its draft programme, contribute to preparations for the debates in the Committee on Non-Governmental Partners (NGP) of the Executive Board (in particular by promoting the participation of a large number of NGOs) and lastly organize a twice-yearly forum on a UNESCO priority issue.

### **NGO participation in the General Conference and the Executive Board**

10. In accordance with the provisions of the Constitution and the Rules of Procedure of the General Conference, official NGO partners with associate status may send observers to sessions of the **General Conference**. In addition, NGO partners with consultative status may be invited to send observers on the decision of the Director-General acting on behalf of the General Conference. Observers can make statements on matters within their competence in the commissions, committees and subsidiary bodies of the General Conference, with consent of the presiding officer; they may address plenary meetings of the General Conference on particular matters of major importance that fall within their competence.

11. As far as the **Executive Board** is concerned, two main mechanisms for NGO participation exist:

- the **Committee on Non-Governmental Partners (NGP)** of the Executive Board, which was established in 1966 as one of its permanent committees and examines matters concerning UNESCO's cooperation with NGOs and foundations, in particular overseeing the implementation of the Directives. In addition, the Committee can carry out thematic debates on the involvement of non-governmental partners in UNESCO's action. NGO representatives can participate as observers and take the floor after Member States, upon the approval of the Chairperson, according to the Rules of Procedure of the Executive Board. Since 2014, the Executive Board has made substantial changes in the Committee's Terms of Reference: among these changes are the reduction of the number of meeting days of the Committee from two days twice a year to one day once a year, which has decreased the opportunity for thematic debates.

- NGO partners may also take part as observers in the other commissions or committees of the Executive Board, on authorization of the Chairperson of the Executive Board, granted upon written request. Partners may also submit written statements at any time to the Director-General on UNESCO programme matters within their competence. These statements may then be communicated to the Executive Board or the General Conference.

### **Thematic collective consultation**

12. Collective consultations on specific subjects may be organized by the Secretariat with specialized NGOs, to ensure their contribution to the development and implementation of certain of UNESCO's priority programmes. The best example is the Collective Consultation of NGOs on Education 2030 (former Collective Consultation of NGOs on Education for All - CCNGO/EFA): it was established in 1984 as a consultancy forum on literacy and has developed to be the main platform for NGOs to contribute collectively to Sustainable Development Goal 4. The CCNGO/EFA includes about 300 NGOs, 100 of which are official UNESCO partners, and works as a network of international, regional and national NGOs that gather every two years to discuss specific issues within the education field.

### **III. NGO participation arrangement in the UN system and in other organizations**

13. For the purpose of this document, this section focuses only on existing formal systems of accreditation and on mechanisms which could be relevant for a dialogue between NGOs and Member States. It is nevertheless understood that NGO engagement is not necessarily limited to these mechanisms. Organizations mentioned below have all developed, at different degrees, engagement and cooperation with civil society organizations. This cooperation can be formal or informal, international or at the grassroots level, field-oriented or more focused on policy-making. It can imply consultation and policy dialogue, advocacy, access to information, operational collaboration and partnerships.

#### **III.1 Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)**

14. ECOSOC's system of accreditation comes from Resolution 1996/31, which provides the framework for obtaining consultative status allowing NGOs to participate in the work of the United Nations. It outlines the establishment of three types of consultative statuses:

- (1) General status: reserved for large, international NGOs concerned with numerous ECOSOC mandate areas. Organizations with this status may propose adding items to the agenda, attend meetings, speak and circulate statements;
- (2) Special status: for smaller NGOs that have special competence within one or a few ECOSOC areas of interest. They may attend relevant meetings, speak and circulate statements, but may not add items to the agenda;
- (3) Roster status: granted to NGOs that occasionally contribute to ECOSOC or subsidiary bodies. They are able to attend ECOSOC and subsidiary body meetings, but may not speak or circulate statements.

15. **The ECOSOC Committee on NGOs** performs the evaluation of NGOs that wish to obtain ECOSOC consultative status and submits recommendations to the Council on accreditations. The Committee decides on oral statements. It is also responsible for the consideration of the quadrennial reports submitted by consultative NGOs, and for monitoring the relationships between the Council and non-governmental organizations.

## **III.2 Funds and Programmes**

### **Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)**

16. NGOs in consultative status through ECOSOC can be accredited to UNHCR and can submit statements to the UNHCR Executive Committee. They may also attend the annual plenary session of the Executive Committee as observers on condition of receiving a standing invitation. Observers are normally given the right to speak, but not to vote nor participate in decision-making.

17. In addition, the UNHCR Annual Consultations with Non-Governmental Organizations are held for three days prior to the annual session of the UNCHR's Executive Committee. It provides a networking forum for debate on global and regional themes and an opportunity to explore collaboration on advocacy and operational issues (500 + attendees including States).

### **UN-Women (United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women)**

18. UN-Women has global, regional and national civil society advisory groups that serve as consultative bodies for dialogue and sustained engagement.

19. The Global Advisory Group, convened by the UN-Women Executive Director, is composed of 25 members, chosen in consultation with civil society networks in order to obtain a balanced and representative membership, including individuals of stature from academia as well as representatives from grass-roots communities.

20. The Executive Board may invite, when appropriate, NGOs in consultative status with ECOSOC to participate in deliberations for questions relating to their activities.

### **United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)**

21. Consultative status is considered through the ECOSOC consultative status. This consultative status allows NGOs and other civil society organizations the opportunity to interact with the UNICEF secretariat as well as the right to present their views to the Executive Board.

22. NGOs are then granted observer status to the Executive Board and can submit statements in accordance with ECOSOC-resolution or if asked by the Board.

23. In addition, the NGO Committee on UNICEF is made up of approximately 60 organizations that promote children's rights and development globally. In existence for over 50 years, the Committee provides input to the UNICEF Executive Board meetings. These annual meetings provide an opportunity for further exchange around issues of mutual interest.

24. Finally, it should be noted that the 36 UNICEF National Committees are established as independent local NGOs, working in industrialized countries to raise funds for UNICEF's work.

### **United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)**

25. NGOs wishing to establish close working relations with UNCTAD are advised to apply for observer status, granted in two different categories depending on their areas of work:

- General observer status, reserved for organizations which exercise functions and have a basic interest in most of the activities of the Board and of its subsidiary bodies. Their representatives can participate in the public meetings of all the intergovernmental bodies of UNCTAD.
- Special observer status, granted to organizations which have a special competence only in specific areas of the work of UNCTAD. Their representatives are entitled to participate in

public meetings on specific matters falling within the terms of reference of the Board or of one or two of its subsidiary bodies.

26. Civil society organizations that have observer status with UNCTAD are invited to participate at UNCTAD intergovernmental meetings where they can make oral statements on matters within the scope of their activities, as well as circulate written material on matters related to the agenda of the meeting.

27. Participation and engagement of civil society in the work of UNCTAD also includes:

- the annual UNCTAD Public Symposium, which provides a platform for participants from civil society, academia, the private sector, governments, parliaments, the media and intergovernmental organizations to discuss topics dominating the global political, trade and finance agenda;
- informal hearings with civil society actors convened by the Trade and Development Board since 2004 to allow them to express their views on the issues before the Board;
- hearings with civil society and the private sector are also held as part of the preparatory process for the organization of UNCTAD Ministerial Conferences. These hearings allow participating organizations to contribute to the preparatory process of the Conferences and to comment on the pre-conference negotiating text.

### **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)**

28. In accordance with its Rules of procedure (which UNDP shares with UNOPS and UNFPA), NGOs with consultative status within ECOSOC can participate as observers in UNDP's governing bodies upon invitation from the Executive Board.

29. To foster policy dialogue with civil society, UNDP has in recent years promoted the establishment of Civil Society Advisory Committees to United Nations Country Teams as forums for strategic engagement by civil society in the work of the UN at the national level. At headquarters, a Civil Society Advisory Committee was created in 2000 to function as the main institutional mechanism for dialogue between civil society leaders and UNDP senior management. It meets annually and members (15) serve on the Committee in an individual capacity, for an average period of three years.

### **United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)**

30. The most common way of civil society working with UNEP and attending the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) is through the nine "Major Groups" defined by the Agenda 21. The NGO major group has the largest number of accredited organizations (238). Accredited organizations of Major Groups have the opportunity to:

- receive unedited working documents of the UNEA first-hand and at the same time as the Committee of the Permanent Representatives, and
- submit to the United Nations Environment Programme Secretariat written contributions to these unedited working documents which will then be distributed to Governments;
- attend the Plenary, the Committee of the Whole and the Ministerial Consultations discussions as observers;
- circulate written statements to governments through the United Nations Environment Programme Secretariat; and

- make oral statements during the discussions of the United Nations Environment Assembly at the invitation of the chairperson.

### **United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT)**

31. Formal relations with civil society organizations are established under the Rules of procedure of UN-HABITAT's Governing Council. The Rules provide for accreditation upon request to any organization in consultative status with ECOSOC. They may sit as observers in UN-HABITAT's governing bodies, without the right to vote or make proposals. NGOs may make oral statements upon the invitation of the president and with the approval of the Governing Council.

### **United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS)**

32. Since UNOPS shares its Executive Board with UNDP and UNFPA, it falls under the same Rules of procedure. The Executive Board may invite, when considered appropriate, NGOs in consultative status with ECOSOC to participate in its deliberations for questions that relate to their activities.

### **United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)**

33. The Civil Society Advisory Panel (14 representatives) provides a formal mechanism for dialogue between civil society representatives and UNFPA senior management. The panel offers perspectives and advice when it comes to advocacy strategies, specific initiatives and other issues related to programme of action. Regarding governing bodies, NGOs with consultative status within ECOSOC can participate as observers in UNFPA's governing bodies upon invitation from the Executive Board.

### **World Food Programme (WFP)**

34. WFP hosts Annual Partnership Consultations (APCs) for local, national and global partners to engage in strategic dialogue and explore how to improve the partnership. FAO, UNICEF, UNHCR and OCHA also attend these meetings.

35. Regarding governing bodies, NGOs interested and cooperating with the Programme may be invited by the Executive Director, subject to the direction of the Board as appropriate, to attend sessions of the Executive Board, without the right to vote.

## **III.3 Specialized agencies**

### **Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)**

36. While formal status is not a prerequisite for partnership with FAO, the organization has built its own accreditation system for granting international NGOs consultative status. There are three official types of consultative statuses:

- (1) *General consultative status* (granted on proposal from the Council and approval by the General Conference): NGOs can attend conference and council meetings as observers, receive all documents bearing on policy or technical questions in advance, speak before the technical committees of the Conference, and speak to the Conference upon request from the Director-General and with consent of the General Committee of the Conference. These NGOs may also be invited to relevant meetings, and submit written statements.
- (2) *Specialized consultative status* (granted at the discretion of the Director-General): NGOs may attend appropriate technical meetings, receive appropriate publications, and submit memoranda to the Organization on technical aspects of mutual specialized interest. They can also be provisionally invited, subject to approval, to the General Conference's sessions as observers and also to appropriate Council sessions.

- (3) *Liaison status* (granted at the discretion of the Director-General): NGOs may be invited by the Director-General to attend specialized meetings.

### **International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)**

37. ICAO Assembly's Rules of Procedure state that NGOs may be invited to an assembly session by the ICAO Council or by the Assembly itself and attend as observers. In this capacity, they may participate without the right to vote in the Assembly, commissions and sub-commissions, unless the meeting is held in private, for which NGOs would need an invitation from the concerned body.

### **International Fund for Agriculture Development (IFAD)**

38. IFAD may go into working arrangements or enter into agreements with such organizations as decided by the Executive Board of the Fund. NGOs with such an agreement may be invited by the Governing Council to attend all or specified meetings of the Council as observers.

### **International Labour Organization (ILO)**

39. As a tripartite organization, ILO integrates sectors of civil society into its structure and its decision-making process: its Governing Body is composed of 28 governments, 14 employers' representatives and 14 workers' representatives.

40. Moreover, ILO has two ways for NGOs to get involved in the organization: (1) through its own accreditation system for granting consultative status, which can be either *general* or *regional* in the access to either all meetings or meetings within their relevant region (as observers without voting rights); (2) through the ILO's *Special List of NGOs* set up to establish working relations with international NGOs other than employers' and workers' organizations; (3) Requests from non-governmental international organizations for an invitation to be represented at the Conference shall be made in writing to the Director-General and referred to the Governing Body for decision.

### **International Maritime Organization (IMO)**

41. Subject to approval by the Assembly, the IMO Council may grant consultative status to any international non-governmental organization which is able to make a substantial contribution to the work of IMO. The Council may also grant consultative status on a provisional basis to any international non-governmental organization for a period not exceeding four years. The privileges that come with the status are: the right to receive provisional agenda for the governing bodies + five main committees; the right to submit documents on items of the agenda of bodies; the right to be represented by an observer at plenary meetings of the Assembly and, on the invitation of the Secretary General, the meetings of the Council or the five main committees; and the right to receive texts of resolutions adopted by the Assembly and, at the discretion of the Secretary General, of recommendations made by the Council or the five main committees. NGOs may speak with the approval of the Chairperson and the concerned body regarding items on the agenda of special interest to the NGO. IMO may also require any NGO with consultative status to report to the Assembly.

### **International Monetary Fund (IMF)**

42. At the global level, IMF's engagement with civil society takes several forms, including: contacts between the IMF management and civil society representatives, in both small meetings and larger forums, including a town hall with the Managing Director during the Annual Meetings; public consultations on the Fund's policy and strategy papers; meetings and seminars with IMF staff and Executive Directors at Fund headquarters and worldwide on specific policy or country issues; invitations by the IMF to contribute to reviews of its policies; a Civil Society Policy Forum organized jointly with the World Bank (see below), which runs in parallel with the Annual and Spring Meetings of the IMF and World Bank.

### **United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)**

43. International NGOs working in a related field may establish official relations with UNIDO. NGOs with established relations are permitted to participate to both the General Conference and the Board. NGOs may intervene in the debates in plenary meetings of the General Conference and in meetings of the main committees on matters of particular concern to them, with the permission of the President. They can also give written statements. The Director-General includes NGOs into Member States consultations in respect of any proposal affecting them, and forwards their comments to the General Conference.

### **World Bank Group (WBG)**

44. WBG and IMF organize together the Civil Society Policy Forum within annual and spring meetings, providing a space for NGOs to dialogue and exchange views with World Bank Group and IMF staff, their peers, government delegations, and other stakeholders on a wide range of topics. Some NGOs also take part in steering committees and advisory bodies of the Bank's programmes. However, they do not appear to have a role in the Board of Governors or the Board of Directors.

### **World Health Organization (WHO)**

45. WHO works with many different types of "non-State actors", including NGOs, but recognizes only one category of official relations, which are established as a result of a procedure that takes several years and includes for instance a three-year plan for collaboration with expected outcomes.

46. NGOs with official relations have the right to appoint a representative to participate, without the right of vote, in WHO's meetings or in those of the committees convened under its authority. NGOs (at the invitation of the chairperson of the meeting) are entitled to make statements and may be invited by the chairperson to make an additional statement for purposes of clarification. NGOs have access to non-confidential documentation and the right to submit a memorandum to the Director-General, who determines the nature and scope of the circulation.

47. NGOs in official relations are also granted the possibility to apply for the organization of "side-events" during the World Health Assembly, subject to specific criteria and conditions and without prejudice to "side-events" organized by Member States, which are selected through a separate process.

48. Generally speaking, non-State actors participating in WHO governing bodies' meetings shall designate a head of their delegation and declare the affiliations of their delegates. This declaration shall include the function of each delegate within the non-State actor itself and, where applicable, the function of that delegate within any affiliated organization.

### **World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO)**

49. The main format of engaging with civil society is by granting NGOs a permanent or ad hoc observer status. NGOs with an observer status are invited to the meetings of the governing bodies and the bodies can decide to invite other observers as well. Observers may take part in debates at the invitation of the Chairperson, but they are not allowed to submit proposals. WIPO accepts both international and national NGOs, though the criteria are stricter for national ones.

### **World Meteorological Organization (WMO)**

50. WMO has two types of arrangements with NGOs (mostly scientific NGOs): a consultative status and a working arrangement. NGOs with either status can participate to all sessions of the WMO Congress and, pending an invitation from the Secretary-General, to regional associations or to technical commissions. NGOs can propose items on the agenda, present working documents on items on the agenda and speak on the items concerning them, before the associations or commissions, with the prior consent of the President of the body.

## **World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)**

51. NGOs with specialized interests in tourism can apply for affiliate membership. Affiliate membership is also open to intergovernmental and commercial bodies. Together they constitute a Committee of Affiliate Members, which takes part in the work of UNWTO on a regular basis. The Committee has its own governing bodies (plenary and board), elections and rules of procedure. As a committee, affiliate members have an institutionalized connection to UNWTO, and they for instance contribute to the preparation of the general work-programme of UNWTO. Affiliate Members can participate in UNWTO's General Assembly, Executive Council, and their subsidiary organs. They may participate in the meetings of UNWTO individually or grouped in the Committee of Affiliate Members. The Committee may propose agenda items, and may be authorized to speak. The Committee reports to UNWTO organs on their activities and points of interest.

### **III.4 United Nations-related organizations**

#### **International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)**

52. NGOs working in a related field may establish official relations (consultative status) with IAEA. Organizations to which consultative status is granted are entitled inter alia to receive the provisional agenda of each session of the General Conference, to be represented as observers, to attend public meetings of the Board of Governors, to submit written statements to the Director-General, to make a brief oral statement at a public meeting of a Main Committee of the General Conference after consultation with the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations to be established by the Board and with the agreement of the Main Committee concerned, and be invited to attend any meetings convened by the Agency (technical conferences, meetings of experts, seminars, symposia and colloquia).

#### **World Trade Organization (WTO)**

53. NGOs can be accredited and take part in the Ministerial Conference, the highest decision-making body of the organisation, which meets every two years. During Ministerial Conferences, NGOs receive regular briefings on the progress of discussions between WTO Members. Additionally, they can submit position papers asserting a position on the issues discussed at the Ministerial Conference. Besides, NGOs can attend public events at the WTO including the annual Public Forum, the WTO's largest annual outreach event, which provides a platform for participants to discuss the latest developments in world trade and to propose ways of enhancing the multilateral trading system. NGOs have also the right to attend public hearings of some dispute settlement proceedings but they are not allowed to present a position.

#### **International Organization for Migration (IOM)**

54. NGOs can obtain observer status within IOM and are encouraged to participate at the IOM Council sessions and the International Dialogue on Migration. Furthermore, IOM convenes regular annual consultations and briefings for a wider NGO audience. Two annual meetings with NGOs are organized at headquarters: one focusing on humanitarian issues and the other on migration more generally. Regional offices and country offices have their own processes or mechanisms for interaction, depending on their particular circumstances and needs.

### **III.5 Other entities**

#### **Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS)**

55. UNAIDS was the first United Nations programme to have formal civil society representation in its governing board (Programme Coordinating Board – PCB, which is composed of 22 representatives of Member States). Five NGOs, three from developing countries and two from developed countries or countries with economies in transition, represent the perspectives of civil society, including people living with HIV, to the UNAIDS board. They can serve for up to three years

and have non-voting status. The five organizations have one representative each and they are supported by five other NGO organizations, which stand as alternate members. NGOs on this board are encouraged to actively seek input from their respective communities in order to improve conditions surrounding HIV and AIDS.

56. The selection of the civil society representatives is carried out by the NGOs themselves. The PCB NGOs have the right to participate in all aspects of the Board's work, except voting, including participation in the Board sessions, submission of proposals and amendments and discussion during the decision-making. The PCB NGOs delegates have the floor after the 22 Member States or when invited to do so by the PCB Chair.

57. As for NGOs that do not hold seat on the governing board, observer NGOs are allowed to attend board meetings and speak after PCB members. They are also invited to the NGO delegation pre-session meetings to collaborate and strategize.

### **Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)**

58. Only NGOs that have consultative status within ECOSOC can be accredited to participate in the Human Rights Council's sessions as observers. In order to attend the Human Right Council, NGOs in consultative status shall designate their representatives for each session and request their accreditation. NGOs with observer status have broad rights in the Human Rights Council. They can attend and observe all proceedings of the Council with the exception of the Council deliberations under the Complaints Procedure; submit written statements to the Human Rights Council; make oral interventions to the Human Rights Council; participate in debates, interactive dialogues, panel discussions and informal meetings; and organize "parallel events" on issues relevant to the work of the Human Rights Council.

## **III.5 Other Organizations**

### **Arctic Council**

59. The Arctic Council is a high-level intergovernmental forum with eight Arctic Member States and six Permanent Participants (Indigenous People's organizations). Its objective is to promote cooperation and coordination on common Arctic issues, especially sustainable development and environmental protection. NGOs can apply for an observer status, with the exactly same rights and obligations as non-Arctic states and intergovernmental organizations. NGOs holding an observer status are invited to all the meetings (Senior Arctic Official (SAO) meetings, ministerial meetings and the meetings of the subsidiary bodies), unless SAOs decide otherwise. In SAO meetings, their role is to observe; in ministerial meetings they may submit written statements. NGOs may propose projects through an Arctic State or Permanent Participant (indigenous peoples). In the subsidiary bodies they should contribute by submitting relevant documents and providing views on the issues under discussion.

### **Council of Europe (CoE)**

60. The CoE has a Conference of INGOs actively contributing to its decision-making process and the implementation of its programmes. The Conference of INGOs has its own bureau, standing committee, thematic committees, elections, etc. The role of the Conference is "to bring the voice of civil society to the Council". The Conference has for instance contributed to the Committee of Ministers' Recommendation (2007)/14 on the legal status of NGOs in Europe, which defines the minimum standards to be respected concerning the creation, management and general activities of NGOs in Member States.

### **AU Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC)**

61. AU-ECOSOCC is an advisory organ founded in 2004 composed of different stakeholders within the AU Member States. ECOSOCC collaborates with civil society organizations through a

formal structure where they are a fundamental part of decision-making within the organization and can impact policy on the highest levels through consultations but also drafting and voting rights. According to ECOSOCC Statutes, its Council is composed of 150 Civil Society Organizations: two from each Member State; 10 operating at regional level and eight at continental level; 20 from the African Diaspora, as defined by the Executive Council and covering the continents of the world; and 6 in ex-officio capacity, nominated by the AU Commission and based on special considerations, in consultation with Member States.

62. AU-ECOSOCC consists of around 150 NGOs. However, the strict requirements on funding from membership contributions results in many African NGOs being unable to acquire membership in ECOSOCC.

#### **IV. PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS OF THE FINDINGS**

63. It is important to emphasize that the findings are mostly based on formal mechanisms outlined in organizational statutes. As such, it is difficult to establish what is enacted in practice and whether they are necessarily best practices.

64. It is possible to identify what seem to be five main mechanisms for engagement with NGOs within the United Nations: accreditation systems; establishment of NGO-liaison units; access to governing bodies; establishment of advisory committees and consultations. Some practices are found in different iterations in numerous organizations, whereas others are unique to a single entity. Very few practices could be identified as specifically aiming to fostering dialogue between Member States and NGOs.

##### *Accreditation systems*

65. There are several unique systems for accreditation of NGOs, frequently adapted to serve specific needs of the entity in question and mostly reserved for NGOs working in a specific related field. Many of the accreditation processes are similar to the official ECOSOC system with two or three categories of possible partnerships. A thorough accreditation system often outlines a clear formal mandate for NGOs, and may function as a framework for the cooperation, including expectation-setting and description of roles for all parties involved. WHO for instance outlines individual working plans for each partnership with expected outcomes, through a process that starts out as an informal working relationship and may take several years to complete. Other United Nations entities and programmes with their own systems for accreditation of NGOs include UNEP, UNCTAD, FAO, ILO, IMO, WMO, IOM and UNESCO.

##### *NGO Liaison Units*

66. A few organizations have established outreach or liaison units for civil society engagements, including UNESCO. The role of the units is to facilitate civil society participation and be a focal point and liaison for NGOs within complex United Nations organizations, as well as to ensure proper consideration of consultations of advisory civil society bodies. Within the United Nations, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN-DESA) should be mentioned, as well as the Department of Public Information (DPI), the purpose of which is to communicate the ideas and activities of the United Nations. In practice, this is done mainly through the DPI/NGO Conference that takes place every year and allows for formal communication between the organization and NGOs, communications workshops and orientation programmes for new NGOs, briefings and the Resource Centre. There are other examples such as: the UNCTAD's Civil Society Outreach Unit, which facilitates participation and engagement of civil society; the Civil Society Partnership Unit in UNICEF as well as its Partnership Advisor who is the main liaison to the NGO delegation; and the UNESCO's Desk for Intergovernmental and Non-Governmental Organizations (ERI/MSP/INO).

### *Access to governing bodies*

67. In general, United Nations entities have similar rules of procedure regarding the mandate given to NGOs and their access to governing bodies. Most organizations allow for NGOs to participate as observers, and NGOs may speak at the invitation of the Chairperson with the approval of the governing body. For the most part, NGOs may circulate written statements with the approval of the Director-General of the entity.

68. Within the United Nations system, the organization that grants the widest access to civil society seems to be UNAIDS. The organization allows for an official NGO delegation in its governing board that contributes in debates and procedures at the same level as Member States, although without voting rights. UNAIDS also provides training to incoming members of the NGO delegation in order to make the civil society participation as effective as possible. UNCTAD holds hearings as part of the intergovernmental Preparatory Committee for the Quadrennial Conference in order to let NGOs contribute to the process and comment on the pre-Conference negotiating text.

69. Outside the United Nations system, in the African Union's Economic and Social Council (ECOSOCC), NGOs can impact policy through consultations, as is common throughout the United Nations, but also through drafting decisions and voting rights. However, it is unclear whether this mechanism is operational in practice.

### *Advisory Committees and Consultations*

70. Many United Nations entities have established some kind of civil society advisory committee that contributes either on regular basis to formal governing mechanisms or competence areas, or on an ad-hoc basis on specific issues. It should nevertheless be noted that in many cases such committees aim at fostering dialogue with the secretariats rather than with Member States.

71. An example of a permanent NGO advisory committee that contributes to governance is found in UNDP, consisting of 15 civil society leaders who meet annually to give advice to its senior management on policies and strategies of the organization. Similar practices are found in UNICEF, UNFPA and WFP. UNWTO has also institutionalized a Committee of Affiliate Members with its own governing bodies, elections and rules of procedure. The Committee takes part in the work of the UNWTO on a regular basis, for instance by contributing to the preparation of the general programme of work of the organization.

72. When it comes to NGO contributions on technical aspects or in areas of competence, the list of examples is longer. UN-Women serves as a good practice in this regard, with global, regional and national civil society advisory groups that serve as consistent bodies for dialogue and sustained engagement. As for thematic consultations, this is a common practice. For example, IOM holds two annual consultation meetings for a wider NGO audience at its headquarters, one focused on humanitarian issues and the other on migration more generally.

73. There are many examples of different practices within nearly all categories of advisory committees in UNESCO. On the governance level, the International Conference of NGOs is designed to provide opportunity for civil society to contribute to UNESCO's programme and budget on a biennial basis. For thematic advisory consultations, the Education Sector provides a good example with its Collective Consultation of NGOs on Education 2030, where civil society can participate in working towards SDG 4.