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United Nations NGO Committee

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Joint Statement by H.E. Ambassador Gillian Bird, Permanent Representative of the Australia to the United Nations, on behalf of Australia, Canada, Iceland, New Zealand, Norway and Switzerland.

(As delivered)

Thank you Mr Chair and thank you for the opportunity to address this Committee. This statement is being delivered on behalf of Canada, Iceland, New Zealand, Norway, Switzerland and my own country Australia.

We thank the Committee members for their ongoing work and are pleased to note that a number of NGOs were granted ECOSOC consultative status in this resumed session.

Many NGOs however, did not gain consultative status and we are concerned that some continue to have their applications stalled by the very process that is intended to aid their participation.

We fully support the application of the Rules and Procedures of the Committee, in accordance with ECOSOC resolution 1996/31, but we question the spirit in which they are currently being applied.

A clear pattern has emerged where some NGOs, particularly those working on human rights-related issues, have faced perpetual questioning over a number of years, effectively blocking their applications. The Committee to Protect Journalists and the Youth Coalition for Sexual and Reproductive Rights fit this description.

In these instances, we believe that the Rules of Procedure are being misused for political purposes to prevent NGOs from gaining consultative status.

NGOs have increasingly demonstrated the value of their engagement in UN discussions. They add invaluable insights and expertise on a broad range of issues, including human rights.

But, as was noted earlier this week by the International Service for Human Rights (ISHR) in its statement delivered on behalf of 230 NGOs, “the practice of the Committee is reflective of growing restrictions on civil society globally at the very time restrictions at the national level make access to the UN all the more crucial”.

Mr Chair

We believe that greater transparency and accountability will improve the Committee’s operations and outcomes.

As suggested by some members of the Committee during this session, and as recommended by Chile, Mexico and Uruguay last year, we would also welcome webcasting of the Committee's sessions. Webcasting would allow NGOs being examined by the Committee to follow your discussions and engage with the Committee, including NGOs from the South which face additional barriers to participation in New York.

We also note with concern attempts made by some members of the Committee to limit the contribution of civil society representatives to the Committee's work. While it is the mandate of the Committee members alone to make recommendations regarding consultative status, the participation of NGOs can enrich your discussions and assist clarify questions and concerns raised.

Mr Chair

In closing, we call on NGO Committee members to refocus on the fundamental goal and objective of the Committee – to support the participation of NGOs whose aims and purposes are in line with the spirit, purposes and principles of the UN.

Thank you Mr Chair and I would be grateful if this statement could be reflected in the official record of the meeting.