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**[ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL](https://www.un.org/press/en/un-bodies/economic-and-social-council)**

**COMMITTEE ON NGOS, 1ST AND 2ND MEETINGS (AM & PM)**

**Opening 2017 Session, Non-Governmental Organization Committee Recommends Consultative Status for 21 Groups, Defers Action on 13 Others**

Opening its regular session for 2017, the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations today recommended 21 organizations for special consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council, and deferred action on the status of 13 others.

The 19-member Committee vets applications submitted by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), recommending general, special or roster status on the basis of such criteria as the applicant’s mandate, governance and financial regime.  Organizations enjoying general and special status can attend meetings of the Council and issue statements, while those with general status can also speak during meetings and propose agenda items.  Organizations with roster status can only attend meetings.

At the start of the meeting, the Committee adopted its agenda (document [E/C.2/2017/1](https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=E/C.2/2017/1)) and programme of work.  It re-elected by acclamation Jorge Dotta (Uruguay), on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States as its Chair; and Ceren Hande Özgür (Turkey), on behalf of the Western European and other States Group.  It postponed the election of its remaining Vice-Chairs.

Navid Hanif, Director of the Office for Economic and Social Council Support and Coordination in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, said among the critical issues on the Committee’s agenda was the timely realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.  Widely acknowledged that the 2030 Agenda could only be achieved through a broad range of partnerships, including with civil society, the Committee played a critical role in opening the doors to them.  Civil society’s interest to be part of the 2030 Agenda process could be seen by the exponential growth, with new applications rising to 747 in 2016 from 143 in 2009.

However, he went on to say, budget constraints had significantly affected the capacity of the Office for Economic and Social Council Support and Coordination.  The Fifth Committee (Administrative and Budgetary) had approved then withdrawn temporary resources, leaving the NGO Branch severely strained to keep pace with the growth in its work programme.  “But, we now seem to have finally reached our limit,” he said.  “We simply cannot absorb the inflated workload and guarantee the delivery of the full complement of applications and quadrennial reports.  It also means that there will be a backlog in the submission of applications to the Committee resulting in inordinate delays for NGOs in obtaining consultative status.”

Reiterating the Committee’s important work, he said it was in the United Nations larger interest to ensure expeditious conclusions and decisions on NGO applicants, particularly in the context of the 2030 Agenda and the need to forge partnerships with civil society in the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Mr. Dotta echoed that message, saying the adoption of the 2030 Agenda had provided a new impetus for the engagement of civil society representatives in the United Nations work in economic and social fields.  The scope of the work was large, with record numbers of applications, he said, emphasizing that he would do his utmost to ensure efficiency in the Committee’s efforts.

In 2017, the Committee would consider 289 new applications, in addition to 235 applications deferred from previous sessions, 360 quadrennial reports of NGOs in general and special consultative status and 90 quadrennial reports deferred from earlier sessions.  The Committee also considered a special report contained in a letter by the Permanent Mission of Turkey.

Marc-André Dorel, Acting Chief of the Non-Governmental Organization Branch of the Office for Economic and Social Council Support and Coordination, drawing attention to the large number of applications, pledged to provide any assistance required during the session.

The Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations will meet again at 10 a.m. on Tuesday, 31 January, to continue its session, which runs from 30 January to 8 February.

General Statements

During a discussion on whether a member of civil society could make a statement before new applications were considered, the Committee could not reach a consensus.  Representatives, among them those from the United States and Greece, believed there was value to hear civil society members speak before new applications were considered.  Observers, among them those from the United Kingdom and the European Union, shared the same sentiment.

Other Committee members, including those from India and the Russian Federation, disagreed, with China’s representative saying, “we just don’t have the time”.

ALEXANDER LOMAIA, of the Secretariat, pointed out that there was an allocated time at the end of each meeting, which could provide an appropriate opportunity for civil society representatives to make a statement.

Special Reports

CEREN HANDE ÖZGÜR (Turkey) said a letter dated 23 January 2017 had been circulated among Committee members, requesting the withdrawal of consultative status of three organizations:  Kimse Yok Mu Dayanişma ve Yardimlaşma Derneği; Gazeteciler ve Yazarlar Vakfi; and Türkiye İşadamlari ve Sanayciler Konfederasyonu.  Those organizations had been found to have had links with the Fetullahist Terrorist Organization, which had staged a failed coup attempt on 15 July against the constitutional order in Turkey.  The Turkish Grand National Assembly had approved a law on 23 July 2016 that organizations had been dissolved.  Hence, the basis of their consultative status had ceased to exist.

Representatives of Azerbaijan, India, Pakistan, Burundi, China, Sudan and Venezuela supported the proposal.

The representative of the United States requested more information and a response from the NGOs before the discussion continued.

The Committee then decided against the United States’ proposal of postponing action on recommending to the Economic and Social Council the withdrawal of consultative status of the three above-mentioned NGOs, with 2 in favour (Israel, United States) to 14 against, with 2 abstentions (Russian Federation, Uruguay) and 1 absent (Greece).

The representative of Cuba said that in the future, there should be clarifications on rules of procedure.

The representative of Nicaragua expressed concern about the vote, adding her support for Turkey’s request.

The representative of Azerbaijan asked for clarification on the vote at hand.

The Committee then took action on the request that had been proposed by Turkey to recommend the withdrawal of consultative status of the three above-mentioned NGOs.

The representative of the United States asked for separate votes on each NGO.

The representative of Sudan said the request was for withdrawing status for all three, together.

The Committee then decided to recommend the withdrawal of consultative status of Kimse Yok Mu, with 16 in favour to none against, with 2 abstentions (United States, Uruguay) and 1 absent (Israel).

The representative of the United States expressed concern about a crackdown on civil society groups.

The Committee then took up consideration of the request to recommend the withdrawal of consultative status from the Journalists and Writers Foundation, which was listed in Turkey’s request as Gazeteciler ve Yazarlar Vakfi.

The representative of the United States said that NGO was operational.  It was based and operated in New York, in the United States.

The representative of Turkey said consultative status had been granted to Gazeteciler ve Yazarlar Vakfi, which could be found in the list of NGOs with consultative status with the Council, contained in document E/2015/INF/5.

A representative of the Secretariat noted a discrepancy in the United Nations database with the name of the organization.  He further noted that the official decision of the Council prevailed on whether or not to withdraw consultative status.

The Committee then decided, by a vote of 16 in favour to 2 against (Israel, United States), to recommend to the Economic and Social Council the withdrawal of consultative status of Gazeteciler ve Yazarlar Vakfi/Journalists and Writers Foundation.

The Committee then took action on the Türkiye İşadamlari ve Sanayciler Konfederasyonu.

The representative of the United States reiterated its grave concern on crackdowns on NGOs.  Because the NGO in question did not exist, she said her delegation would abstain from voting.

The Committee then agreed to recommend the withdrawal of consultative status from Türkiye İşadamlari ve Sanayciler Konfederasyonu, by a vote of 16 in favour to none against, with 2 abstentions (United States, Uruguay) and 1 absent (Israel).

A representative of the Secretariat provided clarification on rules of withdrawing status of an NGO, citing article 56 of resolution 1996/31, which stated that after a decision on the withdrawal of status was taken an NGO must be notified on the decision and shall be given "written reasons for that decision and have an opportunity to present its response" before the Committee.

A representative of the Secretariat said the next steps would be to provide reasons in writing for the Committee’s decision.

The representative of Turkey said the case at hand concerned organizations that were no longer in existence.  Therefore, the reasoning did not apply to the current situation.

The representative of the United States said the provisions of Article 56 applied to the situation at hand.

The representative of India said a perspective was needed because the decision of the Committee to withdraw status was based on the fact that the organizations did not exist.

Mr. DOTTA said Article 56 could not be ignored.

The representative of India asked that if the Secretariat would communicate with the NGOs, to whom would they address the communication.

A representative of the Secretariat said it would use the names and addresses in the database.

The representative of Pakistan asked for clarification on the issue.

The representative of Turkey reiterated that the decision taken was based on the fact that the organizations no longer existed.  Other articles in the resolution, Article 15, for instance, that said the withdrawal of consultative status and the decisions on the matter were the prerogative of Member States.

A representative of the Secretariat said ultimately, the Economic and Social Council decided on those matters.

The representative of India said a letter would be written by the Secretariat to an address that no longer existed.  What Turkey’s delegate had pointed out, he said, was that the NGO Committee should decide on a recommendation and the Council should then take a decision on the matter.  There was no reason to write to a non-existing entity.  Nowhere in resolution 1996/31 did it address this particular situation.  As such, the Committee must decide how to go forward.

The representative of Azerbaijan said in a similar case involving an NGO in his country, the status had been immediately withdrawn.

The representative of the United States reiterated that the Committee’s role was to make a recommendation, with the Council having to make a decision.  Applying resolution 1996/31 was relevant to the decisions facing the Committee today and must be followed through.

The representative of China said the Committee had already made a decision on the withdrawal of status for the three organizations based on the allegations of the delegation of Turkey.  China respected resolution 1996/31, but a decision had already been made, he said, agreeing with India’s proposal.

The representative of Cuba said the situation was marked by a legal vacuum with regard to organizations that ceased to exist.  Therefore, he expressed concerns about to whom a letter about consultative status could be addressed.  Indeed, one of the organizations was operating in the United States.  However, the question remained about who should be addressed.

Mr. DOTTA said if there was a legal vacuum, the Committee should find a way to proceed.

The representative of the United States reiterated that the decision was to proceed to decide whether or not to recommend the withdrawal of consultative status.  There was no legal vacuum, he said.  The action of recommending withdrawal of status, in fact, treated the concerned organization as an NGO.

The representative of Turkey proposed that the issue would be put to a vote by the Committee, particularly that Article 56 of resolution 1996/31 did not apply to the current situations because the NGOs did not, in fact, exist.

The representative of the United States said such a proposal would, in fact, have a subsidiary body override the role of the parent body.  Such a vote would be beyond the competence of the Committee, he said.

The representative of Turkey asked whether the article in question gave authority to the Committee to make such decisions.

The Committee resumed consideration of Turkey’s proposal after a five-minute-long suspension.

The representative of Turkey said her proposal was a request that delegations voted in favour of deciding that the Committee could not contact the three organizations that had ceased to exist.

The representative of the United States said the proposal was inconsistent with Article 56.  He moved for a decision to be taken that the Committee lacked the competence to decide on the proposal by Turkey.

The Committee then rejected the United States proposal, by a vote of 2 in favour (Israel, United States) to 14 against, with 1 abstention (Uruguay) and 2 absent (Greece, Guinea).

Taking up Turkey’s proposal, the Committee voted by 13 in favour to 2 against (Israel, United States), with 2 abstentions (Russian Federation, Uruguay) and 2 absent (Greece, Guinea).

The representative of Venezuela, speaking in explanation of position, said his delegation had voted, but fully supported resolution 1996/31.  If NGOs maintained their legal status, Article 56 of that resolution could be applied.

Special Consultative Status

The Committee recommended that the Economic and Social Council grant special consultative status to the following nine organizations:

“Association des Femmes pour la Paix et Encadrement des Familles” (AFPEFAM) (Cameroon);

African Development Assistance Consult (Democratic Republic of the Congo);

African Green Foundation International (Nigeria);

African Woman and Child Feature Service (Kenya);

Agence de Développement Economique et Social (Chad);

Agro Professional Care Foundation-Yola (Nigeria);

Al Baraem Association for Charitable Work (Lebanon);

Ashiana Collective Development Council (Pakistan);

Association Gabonaise pour les Nations Unies (AGNU) (Gabon).

The Committee postponed consideration of the following six organizations:

AMPHTS (Syria) — as the representative of the United States asked for financial details.

Action pour la promotion du développement (Congo) — as the representative of South Africa asked for disaggregated data and details on funding.

African Women Chartered Accountants Forum NPC (South Africa) — as the representative of South Africa asked for details on funding sources.

Association Marocaine de Planification Familiale (Morocco) — as the representative of Nicaragua asked who funded the organization.

Association M’zab prévention routière et développement (Morocco) — as the representative of Iran asked for further explanation of its activities.

Association Nationale des Echanges Entre Jeunes (Algeria) — as the representative of Nicaragua asked for details on funding sources.

Interactive Discussion

During a question-and-answer session this afternoon, NGO representatives faced questions posed by the Committee.

A representative of the organization United Zo Organization (USA) offered to answer any questions Committee members might have.

The representative of India asked for details on activities in India.

The representative of United Zo Organization (USA) said his group worked with, but were not affiliated with, organizations in India and Malaysia.

The Committee then granted special consultative status to United Zo Organization (USA).

A representative of the organization Mandala Transformation Foundation said her cross-cultural group was helping orphans in Uganda who lacked access to clean water and medicine.

The representative of South Africa asked for details on the Uganda project, considering that the application had shown no expenditures.

The representative of the Mandala Transformation Foundation said due to funding shortages, limited support for the orphans was available, including deliveries of shoes and socks.

The Committee then granted special consultative status to the Mandala Transformation Foundation.

A representative of the organization Congregation of the Mission said his group had been founded 400 years ago in France.

The representative of Pakistan asked why expenditures were about $300,000 more than earnings.

The representative of the Congregation of the Mission said the organization maintained general and national budgets.

The representative of Cuba said there was no project expenditure in Part III of the application, whereas Part I described ongoing projects.

The representative of the Congregation of the Mission said the organization developed projects for communities.

The Committee then postponed consideration of that organization pending the receipt of further information.

A representative of the organization EUROGEO said his group had made the requested correction to its website.

The representative of China said that there were mentions on the website of workshops and a registration form that had mentioned China and Taiwan under the list of countries.  He asked that Taiwan was deleted under that list.

A representative of the organization EUROGEO said the change had been made and Taiwan did not exist on the website any longer.  The representative of China said Taiwan was indeed on the website now.

The representative of Cuba asked about expenditures.

The representative of EUROGEO said expenditures included materials.

The Committee then postponed consideration of that organization pending the receipt of further information.

Special Consultative Status

The Committee then recommended that the Economic and Social Council grant special consultative status to the following 10 organizations:

Association Respect Cameroun (Cameroon);

Association Solidarité pour les Personnes Vivant le Veuvage (Democratic Republic of the Congo);

Association Un Monde Avenir (Cameroon);

Association de l’éducation environnementale pour les futures générations (Tunisia);

Association for Promotion Sustainable Development (India);

Association for Rural Area Social Modification, Improvement and Nestling (India);

Association nationale du civisme (Democratic Republic of the Congo);

Association of Christian Counsellors of Nigeria (Nigeria);

Association pour le développement culturel (ADEC) (Chad);

Avabe Initiative for Community Development (Nigeria).

The Committee postponed consideration of the following five organizations:

Association d’assistance aux grands handicapés à domicile (Tunisia) — as the representative of South Africa asked for details on financial information.

Association de la continuité des générations (Tunisia) — as the representative of South Africa asked for disaggregated data and financial details.

Association de lutte contre la pauvreté (Mauritania) — as the representative of Mauritania asked for names of individuals in the organization and for funding details and the representative of Greece asked for information on the organization’s members.

Association organisation populaire pour l’enseignment des droits humains (Mauritania) — as the representative of Mauritania asked about details of projects and their related budget.

Association pour l’Éducation et la Santé de la Femme et de l’Enfant (AESFE) (Mauritania) — as the representative of Mauritania asked for more details on projects being undertaken.