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OPEN-ENDED WORKING GROUP ON THE REVIEW
OF ARRANGEMENTS FOR CONSULTATIONS WITH
NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

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Item 2 of the provisional agenda*

GENERAL REVIEW OF ARRANGEMENTS FOR CONSULTATIONS
WITH NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

Statement submitted by the International Federation of
Settlements and Neighborhood Centres, a non-governmental
organization in consultative status with the Economic
and Social Council, category II

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraph 10 of the annex to Economic and Social Council resolution 1993/80.

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1. The International Federation of Settlements and Neighborhood Centres (IFS) is an international social service organization that has been accredited to the Economic and Social Council in category II for almost 30 years. It is a Federation of over 4,500 agencies, some of which are national members, while others are federations of national agencies; associate members are single community agencies and affiliate members are agencies providing only one or two services, such as day care or youth programmes. In addition, IFS has many individual members (without vote). IFS currently operates in 25 countries (north and south, east and west). Its structure includes an international membership body (General Assembly), an elected Board of Directors and regional groups in Europe and the Americas. IFS also has a growing number of members in Asia and Africa.

* E/AC.70/1995/1.

2. The present statement is based on the long and diverse experience of IFS in working with the United Nations both in the meetings of the Economic and Social Council and its subsidiary bodies and in the preparatory committees and conferences convened by the United Nations.

3. IFS is grateful for the opportunity to discuss with the Working Group its experience as an international non-governmental organization. This has been a generally satisfactory and useful experience in the opinion of IFS, but, especially since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, IFS has become aware of new issues and difficulties. Most of these are not the result of Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV) but of the proliferation of non-governmental organizations with many divergent concerns and inadequate knowledge of the way in which intergovernmental organizations must operate. IFS is aware of the difficulties faced both by the Secretariat and by Governments in dealing with the problems raised by the new "civil society" bodies as well as their potential contribution. IFS hopes that the current meeting, in addition to dealing with the conference room paper submitted by the Secretariat (E/AC.70/1995/CRP.1), will provide an opportunity for a more general discussion of the issues arising from non-governmental organizations' participation in United Nations activities beyond the specific issue of their accreditation to the Economic and Social Council.

4. The above-mentioned conference room paper presents a basis for discussion of the specific issues. The parallel presentation of Council resolution 1296 and the draft resolution submitted by the Secretariat enables both the members of the Working Group and non-governmental organizations to examine proposed changes and evaluate their significance. The comments detailed below note those changes that IFS supports and those that it opposes, some on the basis of substance and others on the basis of form.

Introduction

5. IFS believes that the concept of an introduction of this type is inappropriate in a resolution that is supposed to determine non-governmental organizations' participation over a relatively long term. The specific reference to Agenda 21 is an example of time bind that is confusing, especially in its concept of major groups.

6. If paragraph 1 is retained, some definition is also needed for the concept of "monitor": does it necessarily include "evaluation"? If not, the word "evaluate" should be added in line 5 of page 3 of the proposed draft.

7. A similar problem arises with respect to "academic institutions". Later in the text reference is made to "academic and research". The references should be consistent, if they are maintained.

8. In line 7 from the bottom, reference is made to development activities. IFS believes that this should be qualified by adding "economic and social" before development.

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Section 1, paragraph 4

9. IFS supports the addition of the words "global" to "human rights issues" but does not understand the elimination of "cultural, educational, health, scientific and technological". These are not necessarily included in the issues in the new provision; IFS believes they should all be covered.

Section 1, paragraph 7

10. Last line: "trade unions" should be inserted between "business" and "organization".

Section 1, paragraph 11

11. Here IFS has a question of substance. IFS does not understand the deletion from the original paragraph 4 of the requirement "covering where possible a substantial number of countries in different regions of the world". IFS believes that this is an important justification for the competence of a non-governmental organization in many fields of work. In addition, with respect to new paragraph 11 itself, IFS does not believe that organizations should be required "for the purposes of consultation with the Council, form a joint committee or other body authorized to carry on such consultation for the group as a whole". The way in which this question is handled in the original paragraph 4 is less authoritarian in providing for minority opinions. This provision should in any case be maintained, but IFS strongly believes that the formation of a joint or group presentation should be entirely voluntary. IFS is an example of an organization that would have difficulty joining any of the proposed groups since it is a social service organization, a category that has not been specifically included.

Section 1, paragraph 15 (new text)

12. The restated paragraph leaves too little specification as to what is a special case. This should be spelled out somewhat along the lines of old paragraph 9, especially "to help achieve a balanced and effective representation ... where they have special experience".

Section 1, paragraphs 18-20

13. IFS strongly supports paragraph 18. IFS does not fully understand paragraph 19, since its experience indicates that the United Nations Children's Fund has very strong cooperation with non-governmental organizations at the regional level. However, IFS agrees that the United Nations Development Fund and possibly the United Nations Population Fund need to undertake such re-examination. With respect to paragraph 20, IFS agrees that the specialized agencies etc. should re-examine their cooperation with non-governmental organizations but does not see any advantage to their harmonizing, since their mandates and their methods of operation imply different means of cooperation.

Section 2

14. No objections: the changes seem useful.

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Section 3, paragraph 25

15. IFS prefers option 1, which defines organizations with special competence in a limited number of fields. However, IFS still believes that the existing definitions are preferable to all the alternatives.

Section 4, paragraph 30

16. The new addition is a great advance over previous practice and IFS hopes that it will receive strong support.

Section 4, paragraph 31

17. IFS protests the limitations placed on circulation by linking it to available resources: IFS knows that this means in practice that the United Nations will not circulate non-governmental organizations' statements, on the grounds of unavailability of resources.

Section 4, paragraph 32

18. IFS would like to see a further change with respect to written statements; there is no real reason why organizations in general consultative status should be enabled to circulate statements four times longer than those in special consultative status.

Section 4, paragraph 33

19. IFS believes that a change should be made here to take into account the actual procedures followed in preparations for the recent series of conferences (preparatory committee sessions and inter-sessional meetings), during which less formal procedures have proved valuable.

Section 4, paragraph 38 (d)

20. IFS prefers the procedures outlined in paragraph 38 (d), (e) and (f) to those outlined in paragraph 32 (d).

Section 7

21. The spelling out of non-governmental organizations' participation in international conferences, including their preparatory processes, is excellent and IFS welcomes that development.

Section 7, paragraph 50

22. IFS recognizes the reason for this paragraph but believes that if it is to be included there ought to be some definition of "negotiating role". Current practice seems to be that non-governmental organizations may observe and are sometimes encouraged to lobby; sometimes they are welcomed in negotiating groups at the invitation of the chairman. In other cases, they are asked not to attend. The diversity of cases is justified but some clarification might help to implement the provision. It might help to say that non-governmental

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organizations do not have a negotiating role but may be invited or authorized to work with Governments when they are seeking to negotiate a document.

Section 8

23. IFS strongly supports the provisions concerning suspension and withdrawal and likes the change in paragraph 55 (c).

Section 9, paragraph 58

24. Council Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations: IFS does not like either option. IFS believes that the Committee should be increased in size but does not understand the regional distribution or the numbers contained therein. IFS thinks that the current procedures should be followed based on an increase, probably up to 24.

Section 9, paragraph 59 (e)

25. IFS has submitted quadrennial reports over many years. Originally, IFS found this a useful process since it was made to assess its own role and review its own contributions. Recently, however, since the reports have been limited to four double space pages, IFS has found it to be almost impossible to cover four years of activity within those limitations; it therefore believes that the periodicity should be more rather than less frequent. On the basis of its experience with quadrennial reports, IFS thinks that it would be more appropriate to have such reports submitted every three years, and that for the sake of the Secretariat they should be staggered to a greater extent. IFS also urges that greater weight be given to the reports; it has always been frustrating to take the writing of reports seriously and then realize that in most cases no one read them.

26. IFS suggests that there should be provision for a subcommittee or an ad hoc committee to meet relatively frequently - at least twice a year - to examine the reports of non-governmental organizations and give their contents more serious discussion. This discussion should conclude with recommendations not only on classification and status but also on the nature of non-governmental organizations' activities. Recommendations concerning non-governmental organizations' reports should be part of a wider effort to bring non-governmental organizations into closer contact with members of the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations of the Economic and Social Council and to further governmental understanding of the role of non-governmental organizations at the United Nations.
