

H.E. Mr. David Donoghue

Permanent Representative of Ireland to the United Nations

H.E. Mr. Macharia Kamau

Permanent Representative of the Republic of Kenya to the United Nations

CC. **H.E. Mr. Sam Kutesa, President of the United Nations General Assembly**

All Permanent Representatives of Member States to the United Nations

19 November 2014

Your Excellencies,

We write to you as the Post-2015 Human Rights Caucus, a cross-constituency coalition of development, environment, trade union, feminist and human rights organizations worldwide. While decisions are underway regarding the modalities for negotiations towards the adoption of the post-2015 agenda, we urge you to ensure the active and well-resourced participation and engagement of civil society and social movements as a matter of utmost priority.

We warmly welcome the very constructive engagement of both Kenya and Ireland in taking forward the post-2015 agenda, including your efforts to involve civil society. We value the emphasis in the 'food for thought paper' sent to Member States on 17 November that there is "broad support for an intergovernmental process which is open, inclusive and transparent and which builds on the working methods used very successfully by the Open Working Group". We appreciate that the OWG process allowed for a meaningful level of civil society inclusion and participation; a vast improvement compared to the MDG process. As you know, Member States, the UN and civil society organizations have dedicated significant time, energy and resources to the discussions and debates surrounding the new global development agenda. We are concerned that this hard work not be undermined, and therefore call on Member States to build on these improvements as we move forward into this last critical phase of negotiations.

Involvement of civil society and social movements is not only a human rights imperative, it is also crucial to determining a set of global goals which reflect the experiences, strategies, needs and desires of individuals and communities, and to the successful implementation of the agenda at the national and local level. We take this opportunity to underline that **participation, transparency, freedom of expression and the right to information are all fundamental components of States' human rights obligations and commitments, and should be foundational to the final negotiations of the post-2015 agenda.**

We understand that the President of the General Assembly has committed to organize two days of interactive hearings with civil society before June 2015. Such a dedicated discussion is welcome, but should be only one of multiple opportunities and avenues for CSOs, NGOs and community-based organizations to share ideas with Member States engaged in the intergovernmental negotiations. The Open Working Group sessions provide some precedent for this. *At a minimum*, the same level of participation and access should be provided to civil society as was available in the OWG process. However, those modalities could be improved upon; for example by adopting an approach similar to what we see at the UN Human Rights Council, where civil society representatives are permitted to take the floor during discussions and attend negotiations.

We emphasize that mechanisms need to go far beyond allocating a speaking slot to only one civil society 'representative' in high-level events. The voices of civil society are diverse and should not be

homogenized. It is particularly important to ensure room for a diversity of community-based organizations and marginalized voices, not just those of large international NGOs that are better equipped and resourced. Adequate, predictable and timely funding is needed in order to make sustained participation a reality (including but not limited to attending meetings), in particular for organizations at the grassroots and on the frontlines. In addition, space for civil society involvement should also be granted outside the international process in New York; States should be encouraged to ensure meaningful participation of civil society in deliberations at the national and regional levels.

Essential baselines for satisfactory civil society involvement in the negotiation process include:

- Open intergovernmental meetings, preparatory commissions and drafting sessions to attendance and active participation of diverse civil society representatives (not just those with ECOSOC accreditation);
- Ensure open access to relevant, accurate and timely information in multiple languages;
- Provide clarity and significant advance notice regarding the timeline and opportunities for civil society engagement; ensure longer turnaround times for consultations;
- Ensure additional measures are taken to reach out to groups who may face greater difficulties in engaging with the process;
- Treat civil society at least at parity with (and distinct from) the private sector; special efforts may be required because civil society generally have far less existing political access and resources;
- Allot sufficient time for regular interaction with civil society during formal sessions, as was the case in the Rio+20 and OWG negotiations. Multi-stakeholder dialogues should ideally be scheduled during high-level events or negotiations (not before or after) and not in conflict with other sessions, in order to incentivize engagement of Member States.
- Support the creation of an enabling environment for civil society in law and practice at national and international levels to maximize civil society participation in post-2015 negotiations.

Many Member States have called for continued NGO participation throughout the negotiations. We respectfully urge you to take these issues into account in your planning of the negotiation process. We stand ready to contribute; members of the Human Rights Caucus based in New York would be happy to meet with you to discuss our priorities and concerns.

Please accept, Excellencies, the assurance of our highest considerations,

Amnesty International (International)
Association for Women's Rights in Development (International)
Center for Economic and Social Rights (USA)
Center for Reproductive Rights (USA)
CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation (International)
CONCORD Sweden (Sweden)
FOKUS-Forum for Women and Development (Norway)
Franciscans International (International)
Gender at Work, G@W (Canada)
Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (USA and Switzerland)
IBON International (Philippines)
International Women's Health Coalition (USA)
Ipas (USA)
KEPA, The Finnish NGO Platform (Finland)
Sisters of Mercy, Mercy International Association at the UN (International)
Southern Africa Human Rights NGO Network, Tanzania chapter (Tanzania)

