

06 March 2018

**For the attention of: The President of the Human Rights Council, Ambassador Vojislav Šuc**

Cc: Chief of the OHCHR's Human Rights Council Branch, Mr. Eric Tistounet

**Re: Improving communication and information-sharing with civil society at the Human Rights Council**

**Your Excellency, Mr. President,**

Our organisations are writing to you to explore ways to ensure that important information about developments at the Human Rights Council is transmitted to civil society organisations in a timely manner.

In particular, we were concerned by the lack of timely communication about the urgent debate on Eastern Ghouta, which took place on Friday March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2018. As we understand it, the letter of request by the UN Ambassador and Bureau minutes concerning the proposal were sent to Human Rights Council members and observer states on Thursday March 1, leading to a decision to hold the debate being taken by the Council first thing in the morning on March 2. The Bureau and/or Secretariat did not, to our knowledge, convey this information to civil society organisations (CSOs) on March 1. An announcement concerning the urgent debate and the deadline for NGOs wishing to register to make oral interventions was made in Room XX on March 2, and an email from the OHCHR's civil society unit was only sent out just before midday that day, despite the list of speakers for NGOs having been open since 10 am. This would have been the first time many CSOs not present in Room XX may have heard of this important urgent debate.

A further example of the delay between the provision of information to States and to CSOs concerns the Bureau's proposals regarding the Programme of Work, which were sent to CSOs a full working day later than to observer states, despite an already brief notice period concerning this process. It has become systematic for there to be a delay between the sending of a note verbale to states and to CSOs.

Such delays can prevent CSOs from being able to participate effectively in the Council's work, as mandated by the General Assembly – and significantly affect the work of civil society organisations not based in Geneva. Just like States that are observers of the Council, NGO observers are an integral part of the Human Rights Council's work. They should be provided with all information, simultaneously with other observers. OP 11 of General Assembly Resolution 60/251, states "that the participation of and consultation with observers, including States that are not members of the Council, the specialized agencies, other intergovernmental organizations and national human rights institutions, as well as non-governmental organizations, shall be based on arrangements, including Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996 and practices observed by the Commission on Human Rights, while ensuring the most effective contribution of these entities." It does not distinguish between different types of observers,

We therefore urge the Bureau and the Secretariat to work together to establish effective communication protocols to ensure that the participation of and consultation with non-governmental organisations is in line with Resolution 60/251, and that preventable communication delays, and the barriers to effective civil society engagement with the Council that they entail, do not reoccur.

We remain at your disposal should you require any further information and look forward to your kind response concerning this matter.

Sincerely,

African Centre for Democracy and Human Rights Studies

Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM ASIA)

Asian Legal Resource Centre

Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies

Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative

Conectas Direitos Humanos

DefendDefenders

Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights

Fédération Internationale des Droits de l'Homme

Human Rights Watch

International Commission of Jurists

International Service for Human Rights

Southern African Human Rights Defenders Network

West African Human Rights Defenders Network