

**Informal Consultations with Civil Society
on the agenda and work of the Second Committee**

**Thursday, 22 October 2015, 10:00 am – 1:00 pm
Conference Room 2**

Informal Summary

The Chair of the Meeting, **Amb. Logar of Slovenia** commended CSOs for their impressive engagement in the 2030 agenda. He underlined that the meeting represents an important innovation, as it is the first time that the Second Committee has organized informal consultations with civil society to discuss the Committee's work and agenda. Amb. Logar emphasised that the adoption of the 2030 Agenda and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, demonstrates the importance of fully involving civil society to ensure an effective, collective response to the challenges of achieving the objectives. In this context, the Chair noted that in the wake of a new era for sustainable development, this is a very timely moment to assess the agenda and work of the Second Committee. As the conception of development has become increasingly multi-dimensional, the Second Committee will need to take a multi-pronged approach to improving its work and agenda on three fronts: Coherence, avoidance of duplication and reviewing working methods in line with resolution 69/321. The Chair also highlighted that with the transformative 2030 Agenda "business as usual" is no longer an option.

Ms. **Barbara Adams**, moderator of the consultations, emphasised the increased openness of the General Assembly to stakeholder engagement in all aspects of its work, noting that the consultations represent a historic moment.

Panel 1: How can the Second Committee ensure that its work is in line with the objectives of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development?

Dr. **Louise Kantrow** (International Chamber of Commerce) highlighted the ground-breaking nature of the 2030 Agenda for development and underlined its conducive approach to fostering actions by the business community for sustainable development. Dr. Kantrow urged all parts of the UN and stakeholders to be fit-for-purpose to support the 2030 Agenda, noting that change will be the order of the day. Dr. Kantrow put forward a proposal for a mapping exercise that should show the current agenda of the Second Committee and in relation to the SDGs. This exercise should be conducted jointly with the Third Committee and ECOSOC to assess areas of duplication. Dr. Kantrow also suggested looking at the outcome of the deliberations of the Second Committee and their impact at the national level.

Mr. **Jeffery Huffines** (CIVICUS) reminded the participants that the alignment of the work of the Second Committee needs to be considered in the larger context of the work of the UN. The work of the Second Committee should not be seen in isolation, but should build upon the work of other bodies including ECOSOC and the Third Committee. Three structural deficits should be addressed in the push to make the work of the UN fit-for-purpose for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda: (1) the institutional governance of the HLPF needs to be strengthened and decision making fostered to ensure that the HLPF can be a guiding mechanism. The HLPF should have its own outcome document as well as a steering committee year-round that can support its work. Such a steering committee

could be chaired by the President of ECOSOC, with CSO participation and broad engagement from other bodies. (2) There is a significant time-shortage in the work of the HLPF. To address this issue, a 5 day preparatory session should be held, with an active participation of civil society. (3) There should be a strengthened and dedicated secretariat to support the HLPF and a trust fund should be established for adequate participation of major groups and other stakeholders.

Ms. **Jean Krasno** (Academic Council on the United Nations System), in addressing empowerment of women as a crosscutting issue for sustainable development, highlighted that political and economic empowerment of women need to go hand in hand, including ensuring adequate property rights for women. Ms. Krasno called for a civil society process, a broad movement of women mentoring women that can empower women worldwide.

Ms. **Eleanor Blomstrom** (Women's Environment and Development Organization) acknowledged that the work of the Second Committee is currently siloed and echoed calls for strengthened linkages with the Third Committee and ECOSOC. A better integration of crosscutting issues is necessary, as well as a focus on exploring and eliminating potential overlaps between the work of these bodies. This requires a clear analysis, which lends support for the mapping proposal put forward earlier by Ms. Kantrow. Beyond the review of the agenda, the Second Committee should address systemic issues, currently not fully addressed.

Ms. **Naiara Costa** (World Vision International) highlighted the importance of coordinated engagement in the work of the Second Committee with other committees, which in turn should be integrated with discussions in the HLPF and ECOSOC. She emphasised that the expertise held by CSOs could add great value to the Member States deliberations. In that regard, she suggested that the Second Committee could hold future informal consultations with CSOs on specific themes so that civil society could provide technical and concrete inputs. In order to broaden informal consultations with Civil Society there needs to be increased predictability and more clarity in the focus of the work of the Second Committee to enable CSOs to prepare inputs and interventions. There should also be greater clarity on what resolutions are negotiated by the Committee. Beyond the call for the UN system to be fit-for-purpose, CSOs themselves should seek to be more efficient in bringing their issues forward.

Brazil commended the chair for the initiative and highlighted its strong involvement with civil society at the national level and in New York. Brazil also reminded participants that the 2030 Agenda represents a main paradigm shift that has not been fully grasped by governments, stakeholders and the UN system. All these actors need to exercise discipline to avoid approaching the SDGs with a MDGs mindset. They furthermore highlighted the crosscutting issues of the Agenda that are addressed in a wide range of committees, such as the Third, Fifth and other Committees. In addressing the role of civil society, Brazil emphasised that CSOs need to be vigilant for issues that do not have a dedicated body within the UN such as inequality. CSOs also need to be engaged in the development of SDG indicators to ensure that the process is transparent and accountable. The technology facilitation mechanism will be a further instrument in which CSOs need to be fully engaged. Brazil suggested that such consultations could serve as a model for other Committees.

Switzerland highlighted the meeting as a continuation of the important interaction of the UN with CSOs on the 2030 Agenda, and as a good example of how the UN can further push for stakeholder engagement. Switzerland also suggested these consultations could serve as a model to be replicated in other Committees. She noted, however, that sufficient time is needed to address the vast array of issues. The decision to review the agenda of various committees needs to be strongly supported by stakeholders. The notion of change needs to be fully embraced, and everyone should adapt to be fit

for purpose. She cautioned that HLPF under the auspices of ECOSOC should not be solely technical as this would deter stakeholder engagement in the process. Switzerland supported the suggestion to map the agenda of the Second Committee, along with those of the Third Committee and ECOSOC.

Palau, in addressing a point also put forward by Brazil, highlighted concerns about the absence of stakeholder engagement in the Paris meetings on Climate Change in December. He warned of political barriers to participation in processes. He emphasised the universal nature of the Second Committee, in its participation, implementation and outcomes, in line with the core goal of Agenda 2030 that no one should be left behind. In that regard, he called for broader engagement with the elderly and children.

The Center for Family and Human Rights stressed the importance for NGOs to work at the capital level. He warned of the high barriers for developing country and grassroots NGOs to participate in UN meetings, compared with NGOs from developed countries. If the General Assembly were to include more NGOs in its deliberations, care should be given to enable participation of NGOs from developing countries as well, which may otherwise foster the exclusion of issues important to billions of people.

Norway highlighted three proposals as useful for the discussion of agenda review: First, there is the need to better integrate the three dimensions in the agenda. Second, duplication needs to be addressed. Mainstreaming does not create duplication, as some issues that are crosscutting need to be addressed in all fora. Thirdly, gearing the work towards supporting the follow-up of the agenda is key to ensuring that the Second Committee is fit-for-purpose.

Colombia stated that it stands ready to support specific proposals for CSO engagement in the follow up work of the General Assembly or the exercise of agenda review. She also urged to recall the reasons why the HLPF is held under the auspices of ECOSOC: ECOSOC will be the body to prepare the work for the forum to ensure follow-up and implementation.

Panel 2: How should the agenda of the Second Committee look like in the coming years?

Mr. **Joseph Donnelly** (Caritas Internationalis) stated that eradication of poverty should be the primary focus of all the work. While duplication is not wanted, repetition of these urgent issues is important to break up the status quo. He renewed the call to leave no one behind, and to focus on the millions living in poverty and hunger.

Mr. **Daniel Dudis** (Transparency International) highlighted the crosscutting nature of public-sector corruption across a wide range of SDGs and its negative impact on development. It is essential to listen to the will of the people, who have taken to the streets in Tunisia, Ukraine, the US and other countries to ask for accountable and corruption-free governance. The UN should be the forum to formalise civil society involvement in the monitoring of implementation of SDG 16 on accountable and transparent institutions.. Civil society engagement also needs to be broadened beyond New York. The UN should be encouraged to conduct consultations with CSOs at the national level possible, to ensure participation of grassroots organisations, as they hold the expertise and knowledge on this topic.

Dr. **Frank Goldsmith** (World Federation of Trade Unions) commended the UN for the already large number of NGOs and CSOs engaged through ECOSOC and DPI. He highlighted the importance of going beyond “business of usual” given the vast range of global crises, including the global financial crisis, the Syrian refugee crisis and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. All organisations should reflect on their role in supporting the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. In that regard, he suggested that the

NGOs quadriennial reports to the Committee on NGOs include a question on what organisations are doing toward the SDGs.

Mr. **Abid Aslam** (ActionAid) observed that the Second Committee agenda already includes several aspects important to success of the 2030 Agenda, such as cooperation with partners with regards to Middle-income countries and South-South Cooperation. The DCF was emphasized as a hub for the multiplicity of issues, highlighting the need to go beyond North-South cooperation as a key forum for an exchange of ideas on development cooperation. Democratic ownership of the 2030 Agenda is key to ensuring that there is a wide range of views considered and that the implementation engages everyone. He noted that accountability to citizens is part and parcel of the vision of leaving no one behind.

Ms. **Bhumika Muchhala** (Third World Network) noted that the Second Committee already covers a wide range of issues embodied in the SDGs. Yet, there is still some ground to cover. In particular, the second Committee should take the opportunity to address inequality in a substantial way. Furthermore, the means of implementation in (MOI) should also be addressed by the Second Committee to ensure that SDG17 is more successful than MDG8. The Second committee should particularly work on the substance of the MoI. The relationship of dialogue on the follow-up to Agenda 2030, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda should be strengthened. She expressed the view that the issue of Tax cooperation should not be left exclusively to the Geneva-based panel of experts, but should also be discussed more broadly within the Second Committee.

Japan commended the participants for their inputs into the agenda review of the Second Committee. They underlined the importance of addressing corruption as an item of the Second Committee. The involvement with stakeholders needs to be sustained in order to have an impact in the long-term, as is the importance of local and national level participation.

New Zealand highlighted the prioritisation issues of the Second Committee. Views should be shared regarding tensions between the 2030 agenda and country priorities, such as those faced by SIDS.

The World Organisation of Creditors suggested that an award be given to stakeholders based on their success in implementing the SDGs, to serve as an incentive.

The Russian Federation underlined the importance of the agenda review of the Second Committee and called on other Committees to undertake similar exercises. He noted that specific recommendations on how the goals of the agenda review can be achieved were not sufficiently addressed by this meeting. Achieving this will require the right balance between the desire to cover everything and the need to specialize, given the complexity of issues. Russia also highlighted the name of the Second Committee as the Economic and Social Committee, which might give rise to the need to change its name. It is important to be careful in not broadening the agenda of the Second Agenda too much, given that the plenary session of the GA would be the appropriate forum to address issues that are not specific to one committee. Russia also stated that the HLPF is not a body but a continuous process, which should work year-round, gaining input across the system.

The United States concurred that here is the strong need to ensure that the Second Committee is in sync with the demands of the 2030 Agenda. The focus on outcome is paramount; the work of the Second Committee should create value that can lead to more productive discussions at the HLPF and to progress for achievement of the SDGs. Moreover, integration is essential given the multidimensional and crosscutting nature of many of the issues.

Guyana joined others on commending the interactive nature of the meeting. Guyana highlighted the importance of contextualising the issue and to consider the original intent for creating the Second

Committee, i.e. the need to give all countries a voice in economic and social issues. The Committee needs to be more proactive in going about its business in this particular time, in getting ready for the demands of the 2030 Agenda. There is no need to start from scratch, but the Committee can build on its past work. The question of operationalising integration was emphasised as essential at all levels.

In closing, **Ms. Adams** highlighted that the SDGs provide a vast opportunity, but also a challenge in its push to integrate issues. She noted that integration does not rule out specificity and deepening, but should impede fragmentation. In echoing the call by many, she underlined the importance of going beyond New York in engaging stakeholders. Moreover, the practical steps in universalisation of awareness will be essential going forward. She also called for Civil Society participation to be diverse and not only channelled through a limited range of processes.

In closing the informal meeting, the Chair indicated his intention to continue a process of consultations, and to reach out to the Chair of the Third Committee and President of ECOSOC as part of this effort. He thanked all participants and the moderator for their contributions.
