

Commission on Population and Development
Fifty-fourth session

NGO consultation on the future role and organization of the
Commission on Population and Development

New York, 12 February 2021, 3- 4.30 p.m. (virtual)

On 12 February 2021, the Bureau of the fifty-fourth session of the Commission on Population and Development held a virtual consultation with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) on the future role and organization of the Commission on Population and Development. In total, 39 NGO's participated in the consultation. In addition, 30 Member States and 2 intergovernmental organizations attended as observers.

The Chair of the fifty-fourth session, H.E. Ambassador Eric Tiare (Burkina Faso) welcomed all participants. He recalled that the previous Bureau had initiated an informal reflection on the future role and organization of the Commission on Population and Development. The Secretariat had prepared a note which included three questions. In his letter of invitation, the Chair had invited NGO representatives to respond to these three questions and to share any other relevant observations. These written and oral inputs would inform a conference room paper to be prepared for the annual session in April.

The Chair briefly reported on the status of preparations for the fifty-fourth session. The Bureau was planning to hold a hybrid annual session, with in-person meetings on the mornings of Monday, 19 April, and Friday, 23 April and virtual meetings on Monday afternoon, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. Informal consultations on draft proposals were expected to start in the week of 29 March, three weeks ahead of the annual session. The Bureau was also planning to schedule a dedicated NGO consultation.

He recalled that NGOs could contribute in various ways to the annual session, including by (1) taking the floor during the general debate, time permitting, (2) participating in the interactive debate of the various panels, (3) organizing side events, and (4) expressing their views on the draft resolution during the dedicated NGO consultation. Details for the modalities of participation were being confirmed by the Secretariat and would be posted on the website of the fifty-fourth session shortly.¹ Other relevant information and documents were being posted on the website as they became available.

The Bureau was not expecting any delegations to travel to New York for the session. In-person meetings would be restricted to Member State delegates, as per the current guidance for official UN meetings. Bearing in mind the evolving situation due to COVID-19, the Bureau and the Commission had adopted a flexible approach in planning the annual session, making adjustments as necessary.

¹ <https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/events/CPD54>

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In total, 14 NGOs took the floor. Delegates expressed appreciation for the opportunity to contribute to the discussion on the future role and organization of the Commission. Several NGOs highlighted the importance of the work of the Commission, which was underlined by the declaration adopted on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Commission in 2019. Even with the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Programme of Action remained an important basis for global action, given that the 2030 Agenda did not cover all the objectives and actions of the Programme of Action. Many objectives of the Programme of Action had yet to be achieved, including concrete opportunities for partnerships with NGOs listed in Chapter 15. In this regard, there was a call for a comparative analysis of the ICPD Programme of Action and the outcomes of its regional review conferences with the 2030 Agenda.

Delegates underlined that the Commission was the only intergovernmental body within the United Nations system mandated to review progress on the implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action. As such, it remained an important platform where Member States and stakeholders could present evidence, hold discussions and share information, good practices, experiences and lessons learned with a view to informing the planning and implementation of population and development policies.

Resolutions adopted by the Commission were critical to drive policy change at the regional, national and local level. For instance, CPD resolutions had helped to harmonize laws, advance modern forms of contraception, reduce violence against women, and raised awareness about early marriages. Resolutions of the Commission had the greatest authority if they were adopted by consensus. However, if this proved not possible, some delegates suggested that the Commissions could consider alternative methods of adoption, including voting on selected paragraphs. Yet, other delegates argued that resolutions of the Commission should continue to be adopted on the basis of consensus in the spirit of the ICPD Programme of Action.

Most NGOs did not consider a comprehensive review of the methods of work of the Commission useful at this stage. Some speakers supported adding an emerging issue to the agenda of the Commission's annual session.

Several delegates called for a greater role of civil society to ensure their full and effective participation in the annual session. They drew attention to other fora, such as the Human Rights Council and high-level meetings of the General Assembly, where NGO participation was more prominent than in events organized under the auspices of ECOSOC. In some of these fora, NGOs had been consulted on the outcome document.

Some NGOs called for a greater role in the annual session for women, youth, and feminist and faith-based organizations, as well as for persons of African descent, indigenous women and girls, and persons with disabilities. Others suggested holding a dedicated half-day dialogue between Member States and NGOs as part of the annual session. NGOs could also contribute technical expertise to the deliberations of the

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Commission. One NGO suggested that NGOs should be allowed to organize side-events without being sponsored by a Member State and proposed that the Secretariat could include such side-events in its calendar of events, noting that this was already the practice in the Commission for Social Development. The issue of equitable geographic distribution of NGO representatives in the annual session was also mentioned. In this regard, the importance of simultaneous interpretation was highlighted.

Some NGOs called for greater involvement of UN regional economic commissions and UNFPA country offices to showcase regional perspectives in discussions at the annual session. It would be useful if the Commission could facilitate exchanges between regions, including on the follow-up of the regional reviews of the ICPD Programme of Action, and focus on sexual and reproductive health and rights. There was a call for the adoption of regional accountability mechanisms in this regard.

Other NGO delegates indicated that raising issues that were not part of the Programme of Action was the main reason for the lack of consensus in the Commission in recent years. These delegates argued that health care, education and maternal health were among issues referred to in the Programme of Action that should receive greater attention and stressed that the outcomes of the regional reviews only applied to the region in which they were adopted. They suggested that the Commission should concentrate on aspects of the Programme of Action on which there is widespread agreement and on which consensus could be found.

Given its tradition of evidence-based discussions, it was noted that the Commission was an important platform to advocate for disaggregated data, especially by gender.

When there were no further requests for the floor, the Chair announced that the Secretariat would prepare a short summary of today's consultation.

He then proceeded to adjourn the meeting.