Breakfast Meeting with Non-Governmental Organizations

In preparations for the 2018 ECOSOC Special Meeting

“Towards sustainable, resilient and inclusive societies through participation of all”

New York, 27 November 2017

Concept Note

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is the outcome of an unprecedented participatory process, marked by the involvement of a wide range of civil society actors from different corners of the planet. This inclusive process allowed the Organization to echo the spirit and the words of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and to show how common responses were called for to respond to global challenges, in an interconnected world. The 2030 Agenda represents a comprehensive roadmap to foster sustainable, resilient and inclusive societies, putting people and their participation in the economic, social and political realms at the core of the Agenda.

As we proceed in the implementation phase of the 2030 Agenda, the continued engagement of civil society is key to live up to the promises. Non-governmental organizations are expected to take innovative action on the ground and mobilize communities. They are particularly well placed to echo the voice of the most vulnerable and marginalized, with a view to ‘leave no one behind’, and to strengthen participation of all people in the development process through collaborative engagement.

This commitment contained in the 2030 Agenda places human dignity at the forefront of public action. It makes social cohesion an ultimate objective of policy making. The Sustainable Development Goals and their 169 targets are quantifiable tools for each organization to determine in which areas action is most needed and to ensure that policies serve all communities. At a time when many societies are challenged by the negative consequences of globalization, leading to political tensions, civil society actors have a special responsibility to ensure that the right messages irradiate societies and inspire leaders.

As we recognize the importance of including Non-Governmental Organizations in the 2030 Agenda implementation, and follow up and review, this meeting also represents an opportunity to discuss how NGOs perceive their contribution to the 2030 Agenda processes and how this complements national efforts in this regard.

The role of civil society actors in holding leaders accountable for the commitments made cannot be overestimated. New mechanisms should therefore exist to facilitate their interaction with political actors, be they Government representatives, Parliamentarians or regional and international organizations.
Yet, the space given to non-governmental organizations to fully play their role as actors, promotors and defenders of the promises contained in the 2030 Agenda remains fragile. It is too often deliberately restricted, thereby weakening democracy instead of promoting inclusion and participation. A collective reflection should emerge to increase trust in our common endeavours and make full use of global normative instruments in support of inclusiveness and democratic space.

Innovative experiences flourish on all continents to foster citizen participation and involve civil society groups in decision-making. Cities and local governments are often the laboratory of such approaches. New technologies, including in the media sector, also have a great potential in giving means to many actors to express social demand and to respond to it through various ways.

The breakfast meeting will provide a platform to discuss these issues and explore collective action on participation and inclusion within the context of the 2030 Agenda and the Czech Republic’s ECOSOC Presidency topic: “Towards sustainable, resilient and inclusive societies through participation of all”. The meeting will engage Member States representatives, at the Ambassadorial level, and representatives of key Non-Governmental Organizations to advance the substantive preparations of the ECOSOC Special Meeting on the subject, to be held in May 2018.

To focus the discussion, participants may wish to prepare their contribution around the following questions:

- **How can Non-Governmental Organizations best mobilize the peoples of the planet in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development?**
- **How does the work of Non-Governmental Organizations support the 2030 Agenda implementation and follow up and review processes, at national and international level?**
- **Which mechanisms involving civil society should be established, or strengthened, to increase accountability to the commitments made in the 2030 Agenda and foster sustainable, resilient and inclusive societies?**
- **What are the best ways to ensure that the voice of civil society is heard in a safe and enabling civic environment, conducive to sustainable development?**
- **How can innovative approaches, including using social media and ICTs, be scaled up to ensure the participation of all?**
- **How can the work of Non-Governmental Organizations in support of the 2030 Agenda be best showcased, supported and promoted in international fora, including ECOSOC, its subsidiary bodies and the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development?**