

46th session of the Human Rights Council
Item 8 General Debate
Federation for Women and Family Planning

Thank you, President. I make this statement also on behalf of the Sexual Rights Initiative, the Center for Reproductive Rights, the Latin American and the Caribbean Women's Health Network, Autistic Minority International, the International Service for Human Rights, CHOICE for Youth and Sexuality, International Women's Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific, CIVICUS, Child Rights Connect, the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies and the Youth Coalition for Sexual and Reproductive Rights.

In the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, States committed to “the real and effective participation **of the people** in decision-making processes”¹ and reaffirmed the interdependence of human rights, development and democracy, “based on the freely expressed will **of the people** to determine their own political, economic, social and cultural systems and their full participation in all aspects of their lives.”² They also called for “the elimination of all socially determined barriers, be they physical, financial, social or psychological, which exclude or restrict full participation” of persons with disabilities.³

Today we ask the Human Rights Council: are you really ensuring people's full and inclusive participation in your decision-making processes, including during this COVID-19 crisis? How can States be accountable to the people for their commitments, statements, positions and votes, if they restrict civil society scrutiny over negotiations of resolutions, if webcast archives are only understandable to English speakers, and if the vast majority of HRC discussions take place without accessibility measures such as closed captions and sign language interpretation? “Efficiency,” “rationalization” and resource constraints arising from the systematic underfunding of OHCHR are not acceptable justifications for these barriers which call into question States' commitment to human rights. In addition, these measures seem to be pretexts for further restricting civil society space rather than effective tools for streamlining the work of the Council.

Where is the accountability for the repeated erosions of civil society space, which disproportionately impact defenders from the Global South and persons with disabilities? Difficult access to negotiations of resolutions; the renewal of ‘efficiency’ measures for another year and removal of general debates in June despite their impact on civil society participation; and the capping of general debate statements this session, all add to pre-existing barriers such as ECOSOC status requirements, reprisals, the high costs of getting to Geneva, travel restrictions, and discriminatory visa regulations.

While we welcome some important advances such as the possibility for NGOs to make video statements, we see that civil society continues to be disproportionately affected by the move of proceedings online. We object to the removal of access details for online informal negotiations

¹ [Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action](#), operative paragraph 67.

² [Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action](#), operative paragraph 8.

³ [Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action](#), operative paragraph 64.

from Sched without explanation or justification, effectively restricting CSO access to negotiations by leaving that decision to individual core groups, and favoring CSOs based in Geneva or with existing contacts with diplomats.

Civil society participation is core to the Council's mandate⁴ and an essential principle of any human rights-based approach. It cannot continue to be treated as an afterthought in the context of the COVID-19 crisis, the HRC efficiency process, and the UN budget crisis.

NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US!

Endorsing organizations:

- Autistic Minority International
- Center for Reproductive Rights
- Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies
- Child Rights Connect
- CHOICE for Youth and Sexuality
- CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation
- Federation for Women and Family Planning
- International Service for Human Rights (ISHR)
- International Women's Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific
- Latin American and the Caribbean Women's Health Network - LACWHN
- Sexual Rights Initiative
- Youth Coalition for Sexual and Reproductive Rights

⁴ [UN General Assembly Resolution 60/251](#): Human Rights Council, operative paragraph 5(h).