

Annex 2

Letter from the Institute for Global Policy and other NGOs regarding civil society involvement in the PBC

29 May 2007

Ms. Carolyn McAskie
Assistant Secretary-General
Peacebuilding Support Office
United Nations Headquarters
New York, NY 10017

Dear Ms. McAskie,

We write to you as civil society organizations deeply concerned with the challenges of peacebuilding and as active supporters of strong and effective work by the UN Peacebuilding Commission. We welcome the Peacebuilding Commission members' commitment, as reflected in the "Provisional Guidelines for the Participation of Civil Society in Meetings of the Peacebuilding Commission," to recognizing the important contribution of civil society to all stages of peacebuilding efforts.

In this spirit we wish to register some observations on the "Provisional Guidelines" as they currently stand. First, we are concerned that civil society has not been consulted in the development of mechanisms for consultation and that discussions on this issue have not been open and transparent, as has been the case when determining mechanisms for NGO consultations with other UN bodies. We strongly urge the Peacebuilding Commission's Chair, the Co-Chairs, the Ad Hoc Working Group on Pending Issues and the Peacebuilding Support Office to meet and discuss the text with NGOs before finalizing the guidelines.

Further, we are concerned that the "Provisional Guidelines" being considered by Peacebuilding Commission members may hinder the participation of important peacebuilding actors and unduly impact the ability of civil society to make important contributions to the work of the Commission.

We respectfully urge consideration of the following concerns:

Civil society selection guidelines and criteria

- We recognize and fully concur with the intention of the Peacebuilding Commission to identify guidelines that allow for non-ECOSOC accredited civil society organizations to contribute to the work of the Commission.¹ However, we are concerned that the current guidelines, including the reporting requirements for applicant organizations, are too restrictive and would be a barrier to the participation of many NGOs and a significant burden for the PBC and PBSO.
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- We encourage the PBC to consider applying a dual track in the selection process, which, in combination with modifications to the guidelines, could streamline the approval process. Non-ECOSOC accredited civil society organizations would be asked to provide information as outlined in flexible guidelines, while NGOs already approved by ECOSOC would not be subject to further vetting.

Process for selecting and inviting civil society representatives

- The proposal for approving civil society participants on a non-objection basis is of significant concern to NGOs.ⁱⁱ This practice is a recent development in some UN hearings and meetings and we are concerned that it is neither fair nor transparent, and that it may not be appropriate for a permanent body of the UN. We find the language in ECOSOC Resolution 1996/31 paragraphs 46-48ⁱⁱⁱ to be fair and effective for approving relevant organizations, as has been the practice for many UN conferences and General Assembly processes. We thus recommend that should a member of the Commission raise an objection to the participation of a civil society organization, the objection should be made in an open meeting of the Commission and clear reasons for the objection should be presented by the objecting member.
- While civil society representatives may be invited to join national delegations where appropriate,^{iv} we believe the text should clearly state that civil society representatives attending meetings as part of their national delegations would be in addition to the invited participants self-selected by civil society.
- Members of the Commission should be encouraged to be mindful of the often cumbersome and costly visa and travel arrangements required to ensure the participation of civil society from the country under consideration. The proposed deadline for finalizing agreement on civil society invitees of one week prior to a meeting is insufficient to allow for travel of civil society representatives from less-developed countries.^v Effective and representative participation from civil society thus requires clear planning by the Commission in approving the invitees, as well as setting the date and agenda of meetings.

Developing mechanisms for civil society consultations in countries receiving advice

- While we fully support consultations with civil society at UN Headquarters and believe they are essential to the work of the PBC, we understand that the greatest contributions from civil society will be in the countries receiving advice from the Commission, including as partners in the implementation of peacebuilding strategies. Recognizing that there is a primary responsibility of the national government under consideration to consult with civil society on peacebuilding strategies, we urge PBC members to develop mechanisms for early, transparent and effective engagement between the PBC and civil society at the country-level. This will be an essential complement to the guidelines developed for consultation at UN headquarters.

We support the Commission's efforts to formalize arrangements for consultations with civil society in a timely manner. We also urge members to give consideration to ensuring balanced, flexible and transparent processes, as well as the overall clarity and coherence of the proposed document. We believe the more collaborative this process is the better will be the outcomes achieved for all parties.

We welcome recent efforts by members of the Working Group to meet with NGO representatives and are prepared to discuss our concerns further. We will continue to support the work of the Commission to sustain and coordinate the international community's response to the peacebuilding needs of countries emerging from violent conflict.

Respectfully submitted,

Action Aid

Vicente García-Delgado, UN Representative
CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen
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Comité Coordonateur Canadien pour la
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Rob Callard, Director
Quaker United Nations Office, Geneva

David Atwood, Director
Quaker United Nations Office, New York

Refugees International

West Africa Network for Peacebuilding

Women's International League for Peace
and Freedom (WILPF)

Paul Mikov, UN Representative
World Vision International

cc: Members of the Peacebuilding Commission Organizational Committee
Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding Support Carolyn McAskie, Peacebuilding Support Office

ⁱ Provisional Guidelines for the Participation of Civil Society in Meetings of the Peacebuilding Commission, section II, paragraphs A2 and A3

ⁱⁱ Ib. at section II, paragraph A3

ⁱⁱⁱ Especially relevant text from ECOSOC 1996/31 paragraph 46: "Member States may submit comments on any of the applications on the list 14 days from receipt of the above-mentioned list by Member States. The comments of Member States shall be communicated to the non-governmental organization concerned, which shall have the opportunity to respond."

^{iv} Ib at section II, paragraph A4

^v Ib. at section II, paragraph A3