



**Oral statement to the Consultations of the Committee on NGOs with
NGOs in consultative status with ECOSOC from the Women's
International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)**

22 June 2018, New York

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Good afternoon.

I am speaking today on behalf of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF).

We have already contributed a written submission that outlines many of the challenges that women-led civil society organisations encounter in receiving ECOSOC accreditation as well as accessing and participating in United Nations meetings. These range from the objections that groups working on issues such as sexual orientation, gender identity, minority rights, and reproductive and sexual rights face in obtaining accreditation and/or status; to travel challenges, such as those relating to cost and difficulties in obtaining visas to host countries. We are pleased to have heard some of these recommendations reinforced by other representatives here today, and also to see that some of them have been taken up in the compilation circulated earlier this week.

Today I speak from the perspective of WILPF's programme on disarmament, known as Reaching Critical Will. We have for many years acted in the role of an NGO coordinator, or liaison, at meetings of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the UNGA First Committee, and most recently, negotiations of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. This role primarily entails disseminating information about conference accreditation and registration; facilitating access; allocating and managing the use of an NGO room to organisations for side events and meetings; and coordinating the oral interventions of civil society. Based on the experience of having engaged with hundreds, if not thousands, of civil society representatives, as well as having participated in numerous other disarmament conferences, we wish to share the following recommendations:

1. Create opportunities for oral interventions at conferences that are timely and relevant to the debate: For example, NGO statements in the UNGA First Committee were for many years scheduled at the very end of the session, which meant that our inputs were too late to be taken into consideration, and merely tokenistic. Several organisations worked together with the 2014 chairperson to pass a resolution that changed the timing so that statements now occur at a more strategic time. A better model comes from the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, a

Geneva-based framework, in which civil society can intervene at any point in a meeting by raising its flag.

2. Promote sponsorship opportunities, or chances to participate virtually or in written form: States like to talk about doing more to incorporate “grass-roots perspectives” and are sometimes critical that only western or northern civil society participates in UN meetings, yet simultaneously reinforce the conditions that cause these situations.
3. Create an enabling environment by overcoming structural obstacles to meaningful participation, including by providing funding and visas for women-led civil society and preventing shrinking spaces due to restrictions from security and counter-terrorism initiatives.
4. Enable access to the floor: Certain UN conference rooms, or rules, prevent or limit civil society representatives from physically approaching and engaging member states to share input on technical issues or take meetings. This undermines some of the primary reasons for which civil society attend UN meetings in the first place. It is also a particular challenge for NGO representatives with disabilities, as we have seen with landmine, cluster munitions, or gun violence survivors that have come to UN meetings to provide testimony as survivors.
5. Keep meetings open to civil society observation: We understand the need for informal consultation, but shutting us out is damaging to transparency. Other measures can be considered. For example, in many instances when a meeting has gone into informal status, we have instructed fellow NGO colleagues to not publically advertise or report on the meetings, or use social media to broadcast the discussion.
6. Designating an NGO coordinator can be a helpful way to reduce the administrative burden on the UN Secretariat and conference chairpersons but also for promoting leadership and effective coordination among civil society. In our experience, our knowledge of the range of organisations and actors working within disarmament and various sensitivities has been beneficial, leading to more effective interventions, avoiding redundancies among side event topics, and in strengthening our community overall.

We thank you for your consideration of our inputs, and making this opportunity available today. In a time of increasing doubt and questioning of global institutions, reinforcing multilateralism is more important than ever.