



INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR ETHNO-RELIGIOUS MEDIATION

"Fostering a culture of peace among ethnic and religious groups"

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U.S. 501 (c) (3) tax exempt public charity, nonprofit and non-governmental organization in Special Consultative Status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)

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ICERM STATEMENT ON IMPROVING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF NGO CONSULTATIVE STATUS

Submitted to the United Nations Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)

“NGOs contribute to a number of [UN] activities including information dissemination, awareness raising, development education, policy advocacy, joint operational projects, participation in intergovernmental processes and in the contribution of services and technical expertise.” <http://csonet.org/content/documents/Brochure.pdf>. The International Center for Ethno-Religious Mediation (“ICERM”) is proud to be among the committed organizations of all sizes and focuses, from countries throughout the world, and we seek to partner with you and the UN in exceeding all expectations for the 2030 Agenda.

ICERM was granted special consultative status, in part, based on its special competence in SDG 17: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions. Our experience in mediation and holistic approaches to creating sustainable peace provide opportunities to expand the diverse and inclusive discussions the UN facilitates—and that will be required to achieve all the SDGs. Yet we are a relatively new and small organization still learning to navigate the UN’s complex structure. We don’t always gain access to information on the events where we can be of greatest value. This, of course, sometimes limits our participation. As such, here are our responses to the questions posed.

- **How can NGOs further contribute to the work of ECOSOC and its subsidiary bodies?**

With the implementation of Indico, it seems there will be better ways for the UN and ECOSOC to engage with the NGOs, based on their special competence. We are excited about the possibilities of the new system, but we are still learning how to use it most effectively. Thus, training would be of great benefit to everyone involved.

It appears that NGOs will be able to store documents, correspondence, and other data regarding their competence, focus, and participation. Yet training will ensure the potential of these features is maximized. Similarly, information and training on effective consulting could increase effectiveness of NGO participation.

There seems to be ongoing improvement in these areas, which is much appreciated. We think we

speaking for all NGOs when we say that we are deeply committed to supporting the UN's mission and the SDGs, but it can often be quite difficult for us to determine how to best access the subsidiary bodies and people who we could most benefit. We are fortunate that our President and CEO, Basil Ugorji, was a UN employee before founding ICERM.

Regardless, improvements can be made on our part by:

- a) Establishing our own schedules for checking UN and event websites to identify participation opportunities. Our work is too important for us to wait for invitations, although they are welcome and helpful when they come.
- b) Aligning with other NGOs who share our goals. With more than 4,500, there are certainly others with whom we can collaborate.
- c) Planning statements in advance on topics likely to be discussed at annual events. When we have already articulated our alignment with the SDGs, the Global Compact, and the 2030 Agenda, it will be easier for us to modify them to fit with session themes.

The UN and ECOSOC could improve NGO contribution by:

- d) Communicating session and event dates at least 30 days in advance. Because many of us must travel and arrange to be away from other commitments, more advanced notice is much appreciated. Likewise, our written and spoken statements will be more focused and thorough, if we are given more time to research and prepare them.
- e) Encouraging missions, embassies, and consulates to meet with NGOs. We want to support those who can share our values, who are pursuing similar visions, and who might benefit from our special competence. Sometimes, it's best for us to do this in more intimate settings and throughout the year, not just at annual events.
- f) Offering more training and discussions, such as this one. Please tell us what you want, need, and expect. We are here to serve. If we can't provide the services or solutions requested, we might have resources we can refer you to. Let us be your partners, connectors, and resources.

- **What are the most efficient modalities for NGOs to contribute to the United Nations policy-making, be recognized and be influential in these processes?**

Although we much appreciate the very open process for many conferences and events, we are often excluded from those involving the special competence for which we were granted special consultative status. This leaves us to independently research ways to attempt access and to focus on sessions not directly related to our competence. The result is not effective for either of us, as statements are often out of context to gain attention for a cause, but likely among people without the authority to act on anything. It would be most effective to align the NGOs and their competence with ECOSOC's needs, ensuring those most interested and experienced work together on specific goals. For example, ICERM would be included in peacemaking discussions and could be called on when impasse or high conflict is expected during sessions.

- **What in your organization's view should be done to provide better support to NGOs during the process of obtaining consultative status with ECOSOC?**

We are watching the new efforts with great interest and currently have no suggestions in this area. Thank you for offering additional training and opportunities such as these.

- **How can the participation of NGOs from developing countries and countries with economies in transition in UN's work be increased?**

Again, through technology, there appears to be tremendous potential to connect NGOs across the

globe with each other and the UN. Encouraging and facilitating collaboration could increase participation of NGOs from developing countries and set a powerful example of how we can all work better together at all levels.

- **Once the consultative status is granted to organizations, how best can NGOs access the opportunities given to them to take part in UN processes?**

We would like to see timely and more frequent communication about various events and opportunities, especially in our areas of focus and competence. We assume Indico will have the ability to push notifications to NGOs, but we are not yet getting relevant content when we need it. So, we are not always participating at our highest levels. If we could select focus areas within Indico and register for select notifications, we could plan our involvement better. This is especially important for NGOs, such as ICERM, that is staffed primarily with volunteers who have full-time employment or businesses to manage outside of their UN work or with NGOs that largely operate outside of New York City.

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