

Our commitment to championing civil society participation at the UN

Thank you Madam Vice Chair,

Let me begin by echoing the concerns raised by the representative of Estonia on the impact of Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine on civil society and NGOs.

As we begin our work this session, we recall the importance of this Committee. This Committee exists because we recognise that civil society is essential to our work at the UN. Their engagement enriches the evidence base at our disposal, making our meetings more effective and more substantial. In turn, this helps ensure that what we do here has an impact on the ground.

For these reasons, the UK is committed to championing civil society participation at the UN. Regrettably, we do this in the face of opposition, with a small group of Member States opposing civil society engagement with the UN, seeking to stifle their voices, afraid of the scrutiny that civil society provides.

Those states deliberately bring inertia to this Committee. Dozens of NGOs have been deferred for eight or more Committee sessions. The politicisation of this Committee is another example of the worrying increase in reprisals against organisations who seek to engage with the UN.

We were therefore pleased to see that, during this year's regular session, some Member States brought the arbitrary deferral of NGOs to a vote in the Committee, as has happened on several previous occasions. Those NGOs put forward to the vote, were ones that had been consistently deferred for years despite responding satisfactorily to Committee questions. We were disappointed that the vote was blocked in the committee by a no-action motion, but we were happy to co-sponsor the decision at ECOSOC, the Committee's parent body, where it was adopted by a wide margin.

We look forward to joining the Committee in January. As we have set out previously, we plan to use our membership to work with others to improve the working methods, promoting transparency to reduce arbitrary deferrals.

This Committee's role is to facilitate NGO access, not impede it. During this resumed session, in order to fulfil our collective commitment to inclusive multilateralism, we urge Committee Members to address the backlog of deferred applications fairly and transparently, and to promote a safe and welcoming space for civil society participation at the UN.

Thank you.