

Open Letter to co-chairs and all the member states of the OWG on SDGs

16 June 2014

Excellencies,

Representatives of major groups and stakeholders of civil society registered to participate in the 12th session of the Open Working Group (OWG) on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), write this letter to you, following the decision to close the session to civil society.

Over 330 civil society organisations have gathered in New York to participate in the OWG, on request of UN DESA with many coming from abroad, at considerable cost, time and resources.

None of the civil society organisations had been informed previously that they would not be able to attend the OWG meeting this week.

Since civil society worldwide are being excluded as they can no longer follow the webcast, at least their representatives who came all the way to the US should be allowed to participate and inform their constituencies.

We echo calls by Sweden, Vietnam (on behalf of their troika with Thailand and Bhutan), Ireland and Germany who specifically called to maintain an inclusive and open spirit of the OWG that benefits from civil society's participation.

As we call for a transformative, participatory and inclusive development framework we have to embody those principles in the process of formulating this agenda. This is in line with Article 248 of the Rio+20 Outcome Document which calls for "...an intergovernmental process on SD, that is open to all stakeholders...".

This exclusion of Major Groups and other Stakeholders contradicts the co-chair's calls for civil society to meaningfully respond and provide concrete ideas for the draft goals and targets. Civil society is no longer able to provide their expertise, as they lack the information on where the discussions stand.

We call into mind the compromise that co-chairs had made, to have ‘informal informals’ in the week preceding the open working group meeting. We therefore object that the informals were resumed during the formal session, and that civil society was subsequently excluded, without a clear reason to do so.

Up to this point our engagement has been very constructive and much appreciated, and we regret that the doors are being closed. This contradicts meaningful civil society participation which is essential considering that civil society is the bridge/interlocutor between governments and the grassroots and the outcome of the SDGs and the Post-2015 development agenda is going to impact all countries of the international community.

Even if the format of the informals is maintained, we call to mind the precedent established by the Rio+20 conference, where the informals were open for observers from Major Groups and Stakeholders.

We therefore ask the co-chairs to either revert to the formal session or follow the precedent established at Rio+20 and open informals to observers. It is important to note that with limited resources, civil society has committed considerable time and energy to work with Co-Chairs, the UN and country delegations throughout the entire process. This is precisely the time when more clear and open process is required. We also call for access to the latest copies of the documents. We are happy to meet with you to discuss this further,

Sincerely,

The Organising Partners of the Major Groups and Stakeholders

- Women Major Group
- NGO Major Group
- Trade Union Major Group
- Major Group Children and Youth
- Indigenous Peoples Major Group
- Local Authorities Major Group
- Business and Industry Major Group
- Science and Technology Major Group
- Beyond 2015 campaign

- International Federation of Medical Student's Associations
- The International Movement of Catholic Students - Pax Romana
- Stakeholder Forum for a Sustainable Future
- Wada Na Todo Abhiyan (India)
- Natural Resources Defence Council
- GCAP
- Feminist Task Force
- IBON International
- Gestos- HIV, Communication and Gender and
- ABONG - Brazilian Association of NGOs support this letter
- Fundacion para Estudio e Investigacion de la mujer
- International AIDS Women
- Caucus and the Women Want Wait International Campaign
- CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation
- WECF International
- International Women's Health Organisation
- WEDO
- Resurj
- FEMNET (African Women's Development and Communication Network)
- Center for Reproductive Rights
- ETC Group
- Equidad de Género: ciudadanía, trabajo y familia
- Gram Bharati Samiti (GBS)
- Center for Participatory Research and Development -CPRD, Dhaka, Banglades
- Centre for 21st Century Issues (C21st), Nigeria
- National Fisheries Solidarity movement Srilanka
- CSO Working Group on post-2015 and African Monitor

- Gestos- Hiv, Communication and Gender /Brazil
- The Brazilian Association of NGOs
- LACCASO - Latin American and the Caribbean Council of Aids Organizations
- International Planned Parenthood Federation
- ICSU
- DAWN
- European Environmental Bureau
- FEMNET (African Womens Development and Communication Network
- Rio+Twenties
- Center for Reproductive Rights
- Forum of women's NGOs of Kyrgyzstan
- SIGLO XXIII - EL SALVADOR
- AGRICULTURAL MISSIONS - USA
- Association de l'Education Environnementale pour les Futures Génération
- AEEFG Tunisie
- Campaign for Peoples Goals for Sustainable Development
- Centre for Community Economics and Development Consultants Society (CECOEDECON), India
- Beyond Copenhagen Collective, India
- PAIRVI, India
- Gram Bharati Samiti (GBS), India
- 21st Century Issues, Nigeria
- Niger Delta Women's movement for Peace and Development-Nigeria
- Commonwealth Medical Trust (Commat)
- NAWO - the National Alliance of Women's Organisations (UK)
- Mining Working Group at the UN
- Council of Canadians
- Blue Planet Project

- Asia Pacific Research Network
- LSU - The National Council of Swedish Youth Organisations
- Centre for Community Economics and Development Consultants Society (CECOEDECON), India
- Public Advocacy Initiatives for Rights and Values in India (PAIRVI), India
- Beyond Copenhagen Collective on Climate Change and Sustainable Development, India
- Adéquations, France
- Asian Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development
- Equity and Justice Working Group Bangladesh (EquityBD)
- Equidad de Género: ciudadanía, trabajo y familia
- Center for Reproductive Rights
- International Chamber of Commerce on behalf of the GBA
- Ipas
- Soroptimist International