



THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

8 April 2024

Dear Civil Society Members,

I wish to thank you for your joint letter of 6 February 2024, regarding the importance of the provision of live online participation modalities for meetings of the Human Rights Council, as well as the United Nations human rights mechanisms.

As outlined in my report on “Our Common Agenda” and my Call to Action for Human Rights, close cooperation with civil society is indispensable in order to advance human rights and to build a more effective, networked and inclusive multilateral system. I therefore value the close cooperation and exchanges with civil society organizations as key partners in the promotion and protection of human rights.

Over the past few years, the United Nations and in particular, its human rights mechanisms, have successfully utilized virtual and hybrid modalities which were first deployed during the COVID-19 pandemic as part of our efforts to ensure the business continuity of the Organization. We have since seen the multiple benefits that these modalities have on participation and inclusivity, by bringing to the United Nations a more varied constituency and by making the voices of those directly concerned by our work heard more distinctly.

However, many procedural, technical and budgetary issues have arisen in the course of providing said modalities. In December 2022, in its resolution 77/262, the United Nations General Assembly endorsed a recommendation of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions that the “provision of hybrid meetings requires a decision from the General Assembly to define, inter alia, the legal and technical parameters of these meetings”. This meant that the Organization could not provide hybrid and virtual meetings beyond the business continuity measures implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic without an explicit mandate from the General Assembly.

All Concerned Members of Civil Society
Organizations

In 2023, the United Nations Secretariat provided the General Assembly with a thorough assessment, including the legal parameters and technical requirements needed (see my latest report on the pattern of conferences, A/78/96). The General Assembly, however, did not take a decision on the matter and, as a result, the Organization does not have a mandate to provide hybrid modalities and we regrettably find ourselves unable to continue providing these modalities. Furthermore, in December 2023, the General Assembly only approved resources for in-person meetings for 2024. While the Secretariat remains committed to explore every possible avenue to facilitate remote participation through the existing approved tools it has at its disposal, only a clear mandate from Member States will provide a lasting and sustainable solution.

I realize that for many civil society organizations, and for numerous Member States, the discontinuation of hybrid modalities poses a series of challenges. I am also concerned that this will affect the work of the human rights mechanisms, including by potentially excluding those voices which are most at risk of not being heard. Insofar as hybrid modalities contribute to decreased air travel, its discontinuation also runs counter to our efforts to “green” the United Nations.

I wish to assure you that the Secretariat will continue to make every effort to facilitate the decision-making of Member States on this important matter.

Yours sincerely,

with my warmest personal regards



António Guterres