

9 June 2014

His Excellency Martin Sajdik
Permanent Representative of Austria to the United Nations and President of ECOSOC

Your Excellency,

Thank you very much for your invitation extended last Friday to meet with you on 12 June. We agree that the Second Meeting of the high level political forum (HLPF) to take place in New York from 30 June – 9 July 2014 at the United Nations Headquarters in New York is of immense importance, and so welcome this opportunity to discuss a number of items.

In addition to discussing how to maximize the opportunities for the engagement of Major Groups and other stakeholders, including those who are working on the Post 2015 Development Agenda, allow us in this letter to outline a few areas of key concern.

Sustainable development today takes the highest priority for civil society and involves millions of people on all continents. This has been demonstrated in the strong commitment civil society has shown in the OWG process developing the SDGs and the Post 2015 Development Agenda. As such, there is considerable interest in the upcoming HLPF meeting, not the least because the HLPF will be the future home for monitoring and reviewing SDGs and post-2015 development agenda.

We helped mobilize the participation of more than 40,000 members of civil society in the Rio+20 conference, the highest ever participation in a UN conference. The Rio+20 Outcome Document recognised this and made several strong references to civil society; the opening and closing paragraphs of the document call upon the active participation of civil society; and an entire chapter is devoted to the integration of major groups and relevant stakeholders¹ in all future United Nations processes relating to sustainable development. Principles of good governance such as transparency, accountability and participation permeate the document signed by nearly a hundred World Leaders, calling on all governments to respect and implement these principles.

When the UN General Assembly adopted the resolution 67/290 on organizational aspects of HLPF on July 9, 2013, Member States emphasised that this was the first manifestation of the content of the Rio+20 Document. 67/290 is based on a number of principles that will modernise the UN, and upgrade and harmonize its relevance to present political realities: it is universal in nature, it is all inclusive and it is neither subject to the UNGA or to ECOSOC, but as the resolution states (paragraphs 6, 7, 8 and 9) - it shall function under the auspices of these two Charter Bodies. This innovative construction allows for the transparent and participatory nature of the HLPF. Moreover, 67/290 clearly stipulates that it will work under the rules of procedure of functional commissions of ECOSOC when meeting under the auspices of ECOSOC.

¹ Paragraph 43 of Resolution A/66/288 (The future we want)

As representatives of Civil Society, we are heartened by the privileges granted us by the UN GA resolution, 67/290, establishing the HLPF. We were also heartened by the actions of the UN General Assembly when Member States agreed in 2013 on the need to promote the active participation of major groups and other stakeholders in all activities of the Economic and Social Council in its resolution on the strengthening of ECOSOC.²

We have been concerned however about how major groups and other stakeholders may participate in the preparations of this HLPF meeting including the participation of these stakeholders during the HLPF itself. For example, we have heard that the draft programme for the HLPF envisages only one hour of a stakeholder dialogue during official meetings and two meetings outside official hours. Should this be the case we are concerned that such limited engagement with non-state actors would establish an unfortunate precedent for future meetings of the HLPF, contrary to the nature of what is expressed in 67/290 and in particular in paragraphs 14, 15 and 16 of that resolution. As facilitators for civil society, major groups and other stakeholders, we underline the need to ensure that the participatory principles are upheld in all HLPF meetings.

Your invitation now to discuss matters regarding major groups in the upcoming HLPF fulfills the principles expressed in Paragraph 84 of the Rio+20 Outcome Document which states that “We decide to establish a universal, intergovernmental, high-level political forum, building on the strengths, experiences, resources and inclusive participation modalities of the Commission on Sustainable Development ...”

The next two years will be formative years for the HLPF, and this first meeting under the auspices of ECOSOC will set important precedents. Working now, as we hope to do in consort with your interpretation and understanding of 67/290, a strong precedent will be established that will bode well for the future of sustainable development, and the SDGs, and will create a positive legacy for modernising the UN.

We feel confident that we can, together, be able to reach agreements which will have the most positive effects in charting the way for an ambitious and efficient HLPF that can follow-up progress on the post-2015 sustainable development agenda and set a precedent for a sustainable global future.

We look forward to seeing you on Thursday.

Sincerely,

On behalf of Organising Partners of the Major Groups
& Global Call to Action Against Poverty (GCAP)

² Paragraph 17 of Resolution A/68/1 (Review of the implementation of General Assembly resolution 61/16 on the strengthening of the Economic and Social Council)