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## **Human Rights Council 48<sup>th</sup> Session, September - October 2021**

### **Item 8: General Debate Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action**

Whilst the number of NGOs in Consultative Status at the United Nations has increased as a result of the important decisions taken in Vienna. It is felt by many organisations that the space for dialogue has shrunk and the ‘importance’ that the *Vienna Declaration* attempted to place on NGO engagement has not been reflected in practice.

An increasing aspect of Human Rights Council proceedings that frustrates NGOs that take the time to research, engage with civil society and then bring their findings to the attention of the Human Rights Council is that beyond the obligatory 90 to 180 second oral submissions, NGOs are rarely acknowledged or responded to by Panel members, Special Rapporteurs or even UN Officials.

The potential opportunity for debate occurs mostly in Interactive Dialogues and Panel Debates. However, the number of NGOs permitted has become countable on one hand.

When the few lucky NGOs do bring issues for discussion, Panel members and Special Rapporteurs almost invariably ignore them and/or fail to address them in their concluding remarks. NGOs feel they have been permitted to speak but not heard.

We respectfully appeal to the High Commissioner to consider this and to further promote the engagement of civil society through NGOs.

It is suggested that a form of audit report be offered under **Agenda Item 8** on progress made in engaging and debating with NGOs under various Agenda Items and what the Office of the High Commissioner is currently doing and/or intends to do to further enhance UN engagement with civil society.

Thank you very much. That concludes my submission...