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Item 4 (c) of the provisional agenda

Arrangements for the participation of non-governmental organizations in the activities of UNCTAD*

Note by the UNCTAD secretariat

I. Mandate

1. The Trade and Development Board, at its fifty-sixth session, approved the communications strategy as set out in document TD/B/56/9/Rev.1. It further requested the secretariat to implement the communications strategy with immediate effect. Paragraph 35 (f) Recommendations of the UNCTAD communications strategy reads as follows:

“Review Trade and Development Board rules of procedure on engaging civil society to reflect Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31, to further facilitate the involvement of national and grassroots organizations in UNCTAD’s work;”

2. This note reviews briefly the arrangements for the participation of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the activities of UNCTAD and the Economic and Social Council, and invites the Trade and Development Board to consider taking a decision to reflect Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31, to further facilitate the involvement of national and grassroots organizations in UNCTAD’s work.

* This document was submitted on the above-mentioned date because the agenda for the fifty-third executive session of the Trade and Development Board was approved on 28 April 2011 at the Consultations of the President of the Board.

II. The Economic and Social Council and non-governmental organizations

3. The Charter of the United Nations, in article 71, mandates the Economic and Social Council to make suitable arrangements with NGOs concerned with economic and social matters. Arrangements for consultations are made for the purpose of enabling the Council and its subsidiary bodies to secure expert information or advice from organizations having special competence in subjects of interest, and to enable organizations that represent important elements of public opinion to express their views.

4. From 1968 until 1996, Council resolution 1296(XLIV) provided rules and procedures concerning consultative status with the Economic and Social Council and its subsidiary bodies. To be eligible for consultative status, an NGO must have an established headquarters, a democratically adopted constitution, authority to speak for its members, an international structure, appropriate mechanisms of accountability, and democratic and transparent decision-making processes. National NGOs had only limited rights of participation in the activities of the Economic and Social Council and its subsidiary bodies.

5. On 25 July 1996, the Council adopted by consensus resolution 1996/31, which contains revised rules on consultative relations with NGOs. An important outcome of the Council's review is that national, regional and subregional NGOs, as well as the national affiliates of international NGOs, are now eligible for consultative status with the Economic and Social Council. The resolution provides that consultative relations may be established with international, regional, subregional and national organizations, and that the Council, in considering applications for consultative status, should ensure, to the extent possible, participation of NGOs from all regions, and particularly from developing countries, in order to help achieve a just, balanced, effective and genuine involvement of NGOs from all regions and areas of the world (para. 5). The resolution also provides that regional, subregional and national organizations, including those affiliated to international organizations already in status, may be admitted provided they can demonstrate that their programme of work is of direct relevance to the aims and purposes of the United Nations and, in the case of national organizations, after consultation with the member State concerned (para. 8).

III. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and non-governmental organizations

6. The General Assembly, in its resolution 1995 (XIX), as amended, entitled "Establishment of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development as an organ of the General Assembly" decided, in paragraph 11, that the Board may make arrangements for representatives of non-governmental organizations concerned with matters of trade and trade as related to development to participate, without vote, in the deliberations of the Board and in those of the subsidiary bodies and working groups established by it.

7. The arrangements for the participation of NGOs in the activities of UNCTAD are based on the Board's decision 43 (VII) of 20 September 1968.

8. The Board establishes consultative relations with NGOs for the purpose of enabling the Conference, the Board and its subsidiary bodies to secure information or advice from organizations having special competence in the subjects for which relationship arrangements are made, and to enable organizations which represent important elements of public opinion to express their views. The participation of an NGO in the activities of UNCTAD therefore concerns those subjects for which that organization has a special competence or in which it has a special interest.

9. NGOs in status receive notifications of and documentation for conferences and meetings convened by UNCTAD. Their representatives are entitled to participate as observers, without the right to vote, in the public meetings of the intergovernmental bodies. They may make oral or written statements on matters related to an item of the agenda on which they have a special competence or interest.
10. National NGOs, in the past have been placed on a Register in accordance with Section III of Board decision 43(VII).
11. Applications for consultative status by NGOs are received by the Secretary-General of UNCTAD. They are approved by the Trade and Development Board on the recommendation of the Bureau.

IV. Proposed action by the Board

12. The practice of UNCTAD regarding consultative relations with NGOs is patterned on that of the Economic and Social Council, whose Resolution 1996/31 states that, in addition to international non-governmental organizations, consultative relationships may be established with regional, subregional and national non-governmental organizations.
13. The Board is invited to consider taking the following decision:

“The Trade and Development Board,

Recalling Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 and paragraph 35 (f) of the UNCTAD communications strategy (TD/B/56/9/Rev.1) adopted by the Board at its fifty-sixth session,

Taking note of the secretariat note contained in document TD/B/EX(53)/6,

Decides that, henceforth, national, regional and subregional non-governmental organizations, as well as the national affiliates of international non-governmental organizations already in status with UNCTAD, are eligible to apply for consultative status with UNCTAD in accordance with the existing applicable procedures and practices for the participation of non-governmental organizations in the activities of UNCTAD.”
