



*European Economic and Social Committee*

**REX/263**  
**European Instrument for**  
**Democracy and Human**  
**Rights**

Brussels, 15 January 2009

**OPINION**

of the  
European Economic and Social Committee  
on the  
**European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR)**  
(own-initiative opinion)

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Rapporteur: **Mr Iuliano**  
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On 10 July 2008, the European Economic and Social Committee, acting under Rule 29(2) of its Rules of Procedure, decided to draw up an own-initiative opinion on the:

*European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights.*

The Section for External Relations, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 11 December 2008. The rapporteur was Mr Iuliano.

At its 450th plenary session, held on 14 and 15 January (meeting of 15 January), the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 115 votes in favour, with four abstentions.

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**1. Conclusions and recommendations**

**1.1 Strengthening economic, social and cultural rights**

The EESC calls for economic, social and cultural rights<sup>1</sup> to be given greater importance in the European Union's policies through the use of available geographical and thematic instruments, including the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights as a complementary instrument.

Following the recent adoption of the optional protocol to the United Nations' Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the EESC asks the European Union to call for the universal ratification and implementation of the covenant and its protocol (see appendix 1).

**1.2 Social dialogue and decent work in the EIDHR priorities**

As one of the ways of affirming economic, social and cultural rights and one of the prerequisites for maintaining peace and the democratic evolution of every country, the EESC stresses the importance of protecting every aspect of work – which is a crucial element of

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Articles 6 to 15 of the Covenant on economic, social and cultural rights recognize:

- equal right of men and women to the enjoyment of all human rights and enjoins States to make that principle a reality. (Article 3)
- the right to work;
- to the enjoyment of just and favourable conditions of work;
- to form and join trade unions;
- to social security, including social insurance;
- to the widest possible protection and assistance for the family, mothers, children and younger persons;
- to an adequate standard of living;
- to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health;
- to an education and

each individual's social identity and right of citizenship<sup>2</sup>. The EESC points to the link between protecting work and all the associated rights set out by the International Labour Organisation core conventions (right to work, right to organise and collective bargaining, non-discrimination at work, outlawing of on child and forced labour) and recognises them as fundamental human rights. For this reason, decent work (as defined by the ILO) and social dialogue, which are a *sine qua non* for affirming and safeguarding labour rights, must be appropriately recognised as priorities of the EIDHR.

### 1.3 **Support for social partners**

As protagonists of the social dialogue, the social partners (workers' and employers' organisations) must be seen, therefore, as the indispensable players and partners of the EU in this context. The social partners must be fully integrated in the political dialogue and must be able to benefit from direct support.

### 1.4 **Strengthening the role of civil society in consultation processes on human rights**

The EESC calls generally for foreign policies adopted by the EU to always put the goals of promoting democracy and human rights centre stage and, in particular, for thematic programmes and instruments to be targeted primarily at organised civil society wherever this is possible.

To this end, the EESC calls for the institutions to reflect upon the role of civil society in the Union's foreign policy regarding human rights and the possibility of involving it more directly in the shaping and implementation of such policy. There must be systematic consultation of organised civil society before any strategy document is drafted, including those of individual Third Countries (CSP: Country Strategy Paper).

### 1.5 **The EESC's role: guidance, monitoring and assessment**

The EESC asks to be formally involved in the internal consultation process before the annual and multi-annual strategy programming of the EIDHR. In this way it can pass on the results of the work that it is conducting with its civil society partners in the third countries with which it has privileged relations (India-EU Round Table, the Euro-Mediterranean area, ACP countries, etc.). It also asks to be consulted for mid-term review and assessments of the EIDHR.

The EESC intends to play an active role in this process, based on its own experience and its own consultation "networks" (economic and social partners and Economic and Social Councils).

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2 - to take part in cultural life.  
Article 23 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on decent work, covered also by Articles 6, 7 and 8 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of 1966.

The EESC suggests that thought should be given to creating focal points to support human rights defenders that would enable the EU's institutions and bodies to work as part of a network, each within its own remit.

The EESC can also play an important role vis-à-vis civil society in the area of post-election follow-up in order to consolidate democratic systems.

Following the example of the European Parliament, the EESC proposes that an EIDHR Monitoring Committee be set up tasked with: (1) meeting urgent consultation requests under the new procedures introduced for the financial instruments, and (2) monitoring the programming and implementation of the EIDHR.

## 2. **The European Union and human rights**

2.1 Protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms is one of the European Union's principal goals both internally and in its relations with third countries. Article 6 of the Treaty on European Union (1999) states that the European Union "is founded on the principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law, which are common values to the Member States"; Article 7 provides for a sanctions mechanism for serious and persistent violation of these rights by the Member States.

2.2 Article 11 of the Treaty also addresses the protection of human rights in the EU's external dealings. The Treaty of Nice, adopted in December 2000, extends the goal of defending human rights and fundamental freedoms and puts it in the context of cooperation actions for development and all other forms of cooperation with third countries (Articles 181 and 181a TEC). Finally, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, promulgated at the Nice summit in 2000, is the touchstone on matters of human rights for both the internal and external dimensions of the Union<sup>3</sup>.

2.3 The exponential acceleration of the globalisation process in the last ten years has made the protection of human rights ever more relevant to the EU, especially where its relations with developing countries are concerned. The Commission and the Council, in agreement with the European Parliament<sup>4</sup>, have for some time stressed the link between development (combating poverty) and the protection of human rights, since it is these that lay the foundations for a country's real and stable socio-economic development and contribute to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

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<sup>3</sup> The European Social Charter of 1961 should be mentioned here, since this is the first legal source at European level to codify economic and social rights. The Charter originally came into force in 1965, was revised in 1996 and has applied in its current form since 1999. Finally, the Community Charter of the Fundamental Social Rights of Workers of 1989 should also be mentioned.

<sup>4</sup> Declaration by the Council and the Commission on the European Community's development policy of 10 November 2000: [http://europa.eu.int/comm/development/lex/en/council20001110\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/development/lex/en/council20001110_en.htm).; European Union Development Policy – "The European Consensus", COM(2005) 311 final.

- 2.4 "[A]s an economic and political player with global diplomatic reach, and with a substantial budget for external assistance, the EU has both influence and leverage, which it can deploy on behalf of democratisation and human rights [in third countries]."<sup>5</sup> This influence is now being exercised by the Union through political dialogues on human rights with countries with which it has relations. Examples include the structural dialogues dedicated solely to human rights (China) and, at regional and bilateral level, dialogues under the Partnership and Cooperation Agreements and Association Agreements with developing countries, the EU's new neighbours and candidate countries respectively.
- 2.5 One special example is the human rights clause that the EU has introduced into bilateral agreements with third countries, which confirms that respect for human rights and democracy is an "essential element" of the agreement. This clause is part of bilateral agreements concluded by the EU since 1992 and applies at the moment to over a hundred countries<sup>6</sup>. Infringement of one of the essential elements can trigger a range of measures at various levels, including suspension of contacts at the political level or changes to the cooperation programmes. The EU also has another instrument: the "social incentive" clause in the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP and GSP+), which lays down additional preferences for countries that respect particular ILO conventions<sup>7</sup>.
- 2.6 Nevertheless, there are still some shortcomings and inconsistencies in European policy on human rights. In 2005, the European Parliament itself adopted a resolution<sup>8</sup> which points out that the "human rights clause" is still lacking in many EU sectoral agreements, including in the textile, fishing and agriculture sectors. In general, it laments the vagueness of the terms and procedures used in the present agreements, which prevent the clauses being applied effectively. More particularly, it highlights the limited role (monitoring and suspension) of Parliament in the negotiation process of the agreements themselves, which give the Council and the Commission the greatest latitude for decision.
- 2.7 Equally, when it comes to the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPA)<sup>9</sup> with the African, Caribbean and Pacific group of states (ACP) and the free-trade agreements for the Mediterranean (ENP), the EU is apt to focus primarily on the commercial aspects<sup>10</sup>. Development aid could risk being seen as an instrument of coercion against the partners of the

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5 Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament: The European Union's role in promoting human rights and democratisation in third countries COM(2001) 252 final.

6 Commission communication on the inclusion of respect for democratic principles and human rights in agreements between the Community and third countries COM(1995) 216 final.

7 Council Regulation (EC) No 2820/98 of 21 December 1998 applying a multiannual scheme of generalised tariff preferences for the period 1 July 1999 to 31 December 2001, OJ L 357 of 30.12.1998, pp. 1-112.

8 European Parliament Resolution on the Human Rights and Democracy Clause in European Union agreements (2005/2057 INI).

9 Negotiations to conclude such agreements, based on the Cotonou Agreement of 2000, were begun in 2002. These agreements provide for the creation of a free trade area between the EU and the ACP partners.

10 How to integrate social aspects into the Economic Partnership Agreement negotiations, CESE 1497/2005, rapporteurs: Pezzini-Dantin

South and the agreements could cease to be effective for the development (and hence for the protection of human rights) of the recipient countries.

- 2.8 The EESC reiterates the need for **coherent and complementary policies** from the EU to support human rights and democratisation that guarantee the same level of priority in the various sectors of foreign, trade and development policies. A more extensive **process of civil society consultation** also appears necessary to ensure that this coherence is adequately respected. Civil society organisations could make a valid contribution at the various stages, from negotiation of the agreements to monitoring and assessment at the implementation stage.
3. **Introduction to the EIDHR** (European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights)
- 3.1 The EIDHR is the EU's dedicated financial instrument for supporting activities to protect human rights and democracy in third countries. As such, it must be seen as a complementary instrument vis-à-vis the other means of implementing policies on democracy and human rights mentioned above: political dialogue, diplomatic offensives, trade agreements and geographical and thematic cooperation instruments and programmes.
- 3.2 This instrument was created under the EU Financial Perspective 2007-2013, which initiated a lengthy process of recasting the Union's foreign aid programmes. This new framework now comprises the geographical instruments **IPA** (a pre-accession instrument which covers candidate and potential candidate countries), **ENPI** (instrument for neighbouring countries, the Caucasus states, central Europe and the Mediterranean), **DCI** (instrument for development cooperation) and **ICI** (for cooperation with industrialised countries) and the thematic instruments **EIDHR** (human rights), **SI** (stability instrument) and **INSC** (Nuclear safety). Implementation of the thematic instruments does not require agreement from authorities of the third countries.
- 3.3 The EIDHR Regulation<sup>11</sup> entered into force on 1 January 2007, creating an instrument with its own budget. It did not have an easy passage, since human rights and democracy appeared in the initial proposal as a thematic heading in the DCI instrument, thus forfeiting autonomy vis-à-vis other development cooperation actions. Thanks to pressure from the European Parliament and **civil society organisations**, a dedicated regulation for human rights and democracy was finally obtained.
- 3.4 This instrument replaces the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights which was the programme in force from 2000 to 2006. The new instrument responds to criticisms levelled at the European Initiative, which was deemed unduly overly rigid at the administrative and financial level and ill suited to civil society in the countries in which democracy and human rights are in difficulty.

- 3.5 There are a number of aspects to the revision of the instrument. One is the multiannual strategy programming, which sets the framework for EU aid and specifies the priorities and indicative financial allocations. The related strategy document is drafted by the European Commission's Directorate-General for External Relations following consultations with other stakeholders, including representatives of civil society. A second aspect is the Annual Action Programme, which is based, by contrast, on the strategy document and sets out in greater detail its goals, areas of intervention, management procedures and funding level. The Annual Action Programme is drawn up by EuropeAid.
- 3.6 It should be mentioned that legal scrutiny by the European Parliament has been introduced for strategy documents drawn up by the European Commission and adopted by the Member States. Parliament's comments are taken into account by the European Commission when the policies are being implemented.
- 3.7 The EIDHR currently has five objectives<sup>12</sup>:
- 1) *Enhancing respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in countries and regions where they are most at risk;*
  - 2) *Strengthening the role of civil society in promoting human rights and democratic reform, in supporting the peaceful conciliation of group interests and in consolidating political participation and representation;*
  - 3) *Supporting actions on human rights and democracy issues in areas covered by EU Guidelines, including on human rights dialogues, on human rights defenders, on the death penalty, on torture, and on children and armed conflict;*
  - 4) *Supporting and strengthening the international and regional framework for the protection of human rights, justice, the rule of law and the promotion of democracy;*
  - 5) *Building confidence in and enhancing the reliability and transparency of democratic electoral processes, in particular through election observation.*
- 3.8 EIDHR is both a crucially important instrument for implementing tangible actions to support human rights and a flagship instrument, especially for civil society organisations, which will find here the prime launching pad for their initiatives.

#### 4. **General remarks**

- 4.1 The EESC takes a generally positive view of the new EIDHR instrument. There is no doubting its importance for sustaining the EU's human rights policy in the world. It takes an equally positive view of the growth in funding allocated to this instrument. Given its particular experience, the EESC is ready to support civil society in third countries, which

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<sup>11</sup> Regulation (EC) no 1889/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 December 2006 on Establishing a financing instrument for the promotion of democracy and human rights worldwide. OJ L 386/1 of 29.12.2006.

<sup>12</sup> EIDHR Strategy Paper 2007-2010, DG RELEX /B/1 JVK 70618, EuropeAid website.

must continue to be the prime recipient of the instrument's resources. Finally, the EESC sees a great deal in common between the issues addressed by the instrument and the strategic priorities pinpointed by its own Section for External Relations.

- 4.2 Nevertheless, the EESC raises two general issues and stresses two requirements: 1) to give greater prominence in the EIDHR's overall structure to the protection of **economic, social and cultural rights, especially the international right to work** (economic, social and cultural rights can be a starting point for subsequently supporting civil and political rights, especially in difficult countries); and 2) to give a **more active role to the EESC and to organised civil society (OSC)** in the various consultation processes with the European institutions devoted to human rights<sup>13</sup>.
- 4.3 As the EIDHR regulation itself states, "the task of building and sustaining a culture of human rights and making democracy work" cannot be achieved without full respect of economic and social rights. **The protection of labour and all its rights** enshrined in the ILO Conventions is now a key pillar of third-country development. As the European Commission itself states: "The EU believes respect for social rights and labour standards leads to durable and equitable social and economic development" and hence that "key players are the social partners (business, trade unions) [...]. Trade unions are often the largest mass membership organisations in partner countries, and are watchdogs for international labour standards."<sup>14</sup>
- 4.4 It has already been said that organised civil society could be more involved during the negotiations of agreements between the EU and third countries. But this is not all. It would also seem a good idea for organised civil society to be more involved in the decision-making process in places where strategic and annual foreign aid programming is being decided. In fact, the Commission is currently envisaging consultations on human rights with civil society organisations. Even so, this procedure should be more transparent and be formalised in the institutional agenda.
- 4.5 In particular, consultations with EU delegations in the recipient countries seem crucial to guarantee that aid is effectively allocated to the society's true needs<sup>15</sup>.
- 4.6 The EESC emphasises that systematic consultation with civil society is also important at intrastate, regional and local level. The EESC therefore encourages representatives at all levels to involve civil society in all political decisions before any strategic documents are

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<sup>13</sup> The EESC notes that organised civil society is important not only for the EIDHR instrument, but for all EU foreign aid instruments. It calls, for example, for the thematic programme for asylum and migration that is part of the DCI to be targeted in essence at supporting civil society initiatives to promote the economic, social and cultural rights of migrants, thus taking account of the priorities the Committee set out in its opinions on the EU's migration policy in July 2008. See also the Opinion on Migration and development: opportunities and challenges – CESE 1713/2007, rapporteur: Sukhdev Sharma.

<sup>14</sup> Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament: The European Union's role in promoting human rights and democratisation in third countries COM(2001) 252 final.

drafted or any strategic decisions taken. Because there is no benchmarking in this area, the EESC suggests that – in order to strengthen the consultation process with civil society – these consultations are monitored and assessed regularly and the outcomes used to evaluate the methods adopted.

4.7 To this end, the EESC points to the need to revive a true *dialogue* between organised civil society and EU delegations. For this reason, the EESC would like to see all the EU delegations more involved in implementing projects and being given specialist staff, dedicated to this task, as in the case of Civil Society Officers, of which there are now a number.

4.8 The EESC calls for human resources and funding allocated to implementing the EIDHR to be adapted to the specific nature of the projects run with civil society and their inherent limitations in terms of time, staffing and financial risk, both in the Commission's delegations in third countries and in Brussels<sup>16</sup>. This requires a specific intervention to select and train staff in addition to the positive moves already taken by the Commission.

4.9 The EESC calls in particular for an analysis of the resources the Union really has available to support capacity-building initiatives for the organised civil society organisations already involved and for small independent and informal civil society organisations, given the need to be able to provide them with targeted and often very modest amounts of direct aid (core funding).

## 5. **Specific remarks**

### 5.1 *Objective 1:*

The EESC welcomes the specific inclusion of the **right of association and to establish or belong to a trade union** as the basis for priority intervention under this objective.

Nevertheless, the **right to collective bargaining**, which complements the right of association and is also enshrined in the conventions of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), should also be specified.

The EESC points out that these matters are relevant and crucial for many countries<sup>17</sup>. In these situations, fundamental freedoms of expression and association are being denied; some members of trade unions often pay with their lives for their battle for their rights. In this

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<sup>15</sup> In particular, there must be coherence in the distribution of financial resources between the various countries and geographical areas, taking into account of the real state of affairs and real needs.

<sup>16</sup> Resources set aside for EIDHR currently amount to around 10% of all funding available for cooperation programmes. The rest is allocated through bilateral agreements and budgetary support agreements for recipient countries. This approach means that, as well as the most relevant allocations being channelled at government level, delegation staff must pay more attention to and be more available for programmes that have a higher priority from the financial point of view.

<sup>17</sup> See the UNHCR (United Nations Human Rights Council) website.

context, international solidarity and assistance – involving all wherever possible – are needed to give support to local organisations<sup>18</sup>.

Nevertheless, the EESC stresses the importance of freedom to operate businesses, which contributes to economic development and is often hampered in various countries.

## 5.2 *Objective 2:*

This objective focuses on democratic reforms, supports the reconciliation of the interests of various groups and consolidates participation and representativeness. The EESC points to the **absence of social dialogue** in the priorities cited in the Action Plan.

Although the freedom of association is reaffirmed, social dialogue should be expressly mentioned as a priority instrument in its own right for the participation and representation of interest groups – in this case, the social partners (employers and workers) – and the reconciliation of their interests. Social dialogue is a means of reconciling the interests of the parties which often enables them to reach their own accommodation. The principle of equality of representation and the affirmation of the fundamental principles of democracy is thus intrinsic in this process. In this way, social dialogue constitutes tangible proof of the exercise of the freedoms of expression and association which are, as the EIDHR itself states, "the preconditions for political pluralism and democratic process".

The implementation of social dialogue, established as a model for reaching agreement between social partners in the EU, should also be supported in third countries, where it is precisely the dynamics of democracy that need to be exercised and strengthened. It should not be forgotten that social dialogue is also, by its very nature, an instrument of conflict-prevention as well as conflict-resolution.

The EESC draws attention to the fact that the freedom of association and social dialogue are fundamental components for the application of policies to support **decent work**, which both the Commission and the Council adopted and espoused in 2006<sup>19</sup>. It also points out that the EIDHR strategy document refers explicitly to promoting conditions for decent work. It would therefore like to see these considerations being transformed into real and true objectives of the human rights instrument.

## 5.3 *Objective 3: Human rights defenders*

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<sup>18</sup> See Opinion CESE 772/2008: Freedom of association in the Euromed partner countries, rapporteur Juan Moreno.

<sup>19</sup> Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions Promoting decent work for all, COM(2006) 249.

The EESC calls for greater attention to be paid to those that champion labour rights and proposes boosting the support afforded human rights defenders under threat, in collaboration with networks of civil society organisations<sup>20</sup>.

The EESC suggests that thought should be given to creating focal points to support human rights defenders that would enable the EU's institutions and bodies to work as part of a network, each within its own remit (including the Council of Europe, which has already launched initiatives to this end).

Finally, it proposes collaboration with, and direct involvement of, the Committee of the Regions in initiatives on this subject (see, for example, "les villes refuges"<sup>21</sup>).

#### 5.4 The specific role of the EESC

The EESC requests that the European Commission consult it regularly regarding EIDHR. As the consultative body of the European institutions in which the social partners and other civil society organisations are represented, which in turn work actively in partnership with civil society organisations in third countries, the EESC has a valid contribution to make to both the instrument's strategic programming and its evaluation.

Following the example of the European Parliament, the EESC proposes that an EIDHR Monitoring Committee be set up tasked with: (1) meeting urgent consultation requests under the new procedures introduced for the financial instruments, and (2) monitoring the programming and implementation of the EIDHR.

Finally, the EESC can play a role in support of civil society in "difficult" countries, for example in post-election monitoring to consolidate democratic systems (the establishment of democratic institutions, especially ones to ensure dialogue between social partners).

Brussels, 15 January 2009.

The President  
of the  
European Economic and Social Committee

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20 These include coordination and implementation measures in the event of human and trade union rights violations instituted by the Human and Trade Union Rights Department of the International Trade Unions Confederation (ITUC).

21 See, for instance, <http://www.icorn.org>.

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**N.B.:** Appendix overleaf.

Appendix 1

**The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights**

- The primary basis of United Nations (UN) activities to promote, protect and monitor human rights and fundamental freedoms is the International Bill of Human Rights. The Bill comprises three texts: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966), and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) and its two optional protocols.
- The UN General Assembly adopted and opened the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights for signature, ratification and accession in 1966. It entered into force on 3 January 1976. As of today, there are 159 States that are parties to the treaty.
- The Covenant recognizes:
  - equal right of men and women to the enjoyment of all human rights and enjoins States to make that principle a reality. (Article 3)
  - the right to work;
  - to the enjoyment of just and favourable conditions of work;
  - to form and join trade unions;
  - to social security, including social insurance;
  - to the widest possible protection and assistance for the family, mothers, children and younger persons;
  - to an adequate standard of living;
  - to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health;
  - to an education and
  - to take part in cultural life.
- To monitor the implementation of the Covenant, the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) established the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) on 28 May 1985. The CESCR is composed of 18 independent experts in the field of human rights which are elected by ECOSOC for a four year term. All States parties are obliged to submit regular reports to the Committee on how the rights are being implemented. States must report initially within two years of accepting the Covenant and thereafter every five years. The Committee examines each report and addresses its concerns and recommendations to the State party in the form of “concluding observations”.
- The CESCR has long recognized the important contribution which can be made by civil society in providing information on the status of the Covenant within States parties. The CESCR was the first treaty body to provide non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with the opportunity to submit written statements and make oral submissions dealing with issues relating to the enjoyment or non-enjoyment of the rights contained in the Covenant in specific countries. The active

participation of NGOs in the work of the CESCR has proven to be fundamental in ensuring the wide distribution of information about the Covenant and the CESCR at the national and local levels. In many instances, these organizations have generated substantial media attention in their countries following the adoption of concluding observations regarding the States in question.

- In 1990, the CESCR formally started discussions on an Optional Protocol to the Covenant, with a view to establish an individual complaint mechanism that would give any individual or group claiming to be a victim of a violation of any rights recognized in the Covenant the right to submit a written communication to the CESCR for examination. In 2002, the Commission on Human Rights decided to establish a Working Group with the mandate to elaborate such a protocol. On 4 April 2008, the Working Group adopted its report ad referendum and transmitted the draft Optional Protocol to the UN Human Rights Council for its consideration. On 18 June 2008, the UN Human Rights Council adopted the Optional Protocol and recommended that the UN General Assembly adopts and opens for signature, ratification and accession the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, at a signing ceremony in Geneva in March 2009.

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