



A Practical Guide for Civil Society

THE SOCIAL FORUM OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL



UNITED NATIONS



UNITED NATIONS
HUMAN RIGHTS
OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER

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Introduction

What is the Social Forum?

The Social Forum is an annual meeting convened by the United Nations Human Rights Council. It serves as a unique space for open and interactive dialogue between civil society actors, representatives of United Nations Member States, and intergovernmental organizations.



How does it work?

The Social Forum meets once a year (usually October) for a three-day period on a theme chosen by the Human Rights Council at its March session. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights presents a report as a background contribution to the dialogue. The Chairperson-Rapporteur of the Forum is a representative of a Member State, appointed by the President of the Human Rights Council on the basis of geographic rotation. In general, the format of the meeting consists of presentations by experts on topics related to the theme, followed by open discussion by meeting participants.

All participants, including civil society organizations and other stakeholders, are encouraged to take an active part in shaping the programme through proposals to the Secretariat, such as content and speakers. A distinguishing feature of the Forum format for meetings of the Human Rights Council, is the egalitarian nature of participation. Civil society actors participate on an equal footing with Member States. For example, the absence of a traditional hierarchy of participation means there is no specified seating arrangement, or speaking order.

The outcome of the meeting is a report of the Forum which is submitted to the Human Rights Council for consideration at its subsequent session in March. The Council in turn encourages States, international organizations and civil society actors to consider the conclusions and recommendations of the Forum in their future programmes and strategies.

In 2012, the theme of the Social Forum is, "People-centred development and globalization."



Recent Themes of the Social Forum:

2011: Promotion of the right to development

Topics of discussions:

- ▶ Legal and social action strategies
- ▶ Social Justice
- ▶ Innovative approaches to participation and accountability
- ▶ International institutional frameworks
- ▶ Financing for development

2010: Adverse effects of climate change on human rights

Topics of discussions:

- ▶ Human rights concerns of vulnerable groups
- ▶ National, regional and international measures to address the impact of climate change
- ▶ Social dimension and good governance aspects of climate change negotiations
- ▶ Green economy and technology transfer

2009: Impacts of economic and financial crises on efforts to combat poverty

Topics of discussions:

- ▶ Human rights approaches for addressing the social protection gap
- ▶ Best practices of States in implementing social security programmes
- ▶ Role of civil society in improving availability and efficacy of social protection systems
- ▶ Enhancing efforts to combat poverty
- ▶ Protecting human rights of vulnerable groups
- ▶ Improving policy coherence and effectiveness of international assistance and cooperation



2008: Eradication of poverty and social dimension of the globalization process

Topics of discussions:

- ▶ Normative framework
- ▶ Factors and elements of an enabling environment (foreign debt issues; international assistance and cooperation; international trade policies; role of the State, civil society and transnational corporations in poverty eradication)
- ▶ National strategies in the globalization process (decent and favourable work conditions; good governance)
- ▶ Globalization challenges (health care; climate change; food security)



Accreditation



Participation in the Social Forum is open to representatives of United Nations Member States, intergovernmental organizations, United Nations human rights mechanisms, representatives of national human rights institutions, civil society actors (e.g. non-governmental organizations, rural and urban associations from the North and the South, anti-poverty groups, peasants' and farmers' organizations and their national and international associations, social movements, voluntary organizations, youth associations, community organizations, trade unions and associations of workers, etc.), as well as representatives of the private sector, regional banks, other financial institutions, and international development agencies.

Civil society actors planning to attend the Social Forum must send a letter of request for accreditation by email to the Secretariat (socialforum@ohchr.org) within the deadline specified on the website of the Social Forum (<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Poverty/SForum/Pages/SForumIndex.aspx>). The OHCHR serves as the Secretariat for the Social Forum.

The letter must contain the following elements:

- ▶ Submitted on the official letterhead of the organization;
- ▶ State the title and duration of the session the organization wishes to attend, e.g. "[Name of organization], [if applicable, please indicate after the name of the organization, "in consultative status with Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC)"], wishes to send the following members to attend the [year] Social Forum of the Human Rights Council (dates of session)...";
- ▶ List the name/s (FAMILY NAME, First name) of the person/s who will represent the organization at the session. Names of persons must appear exactly as they appear in their passports;
- ▶ Identify those representatives already in possession of a valid identity badge issued by the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG), Security and Safety Section, who plan to attend the session;



- ▶ Those who do not have a valid identity badge must complete the Conference Registration Form (one per person) and attach it to the letter. The form is available on the website of the Social Forum.
- ▶ For NGOs and other civil society organizations without consultative status with ECOSOC, please include: website of the organization; dates of participation at previous sessions of the Social Forum or any other United Nations human rights meetings; and a brief description of activities carried out by the organization which are relevant to the work of the Social Forum;
- ▶ The letter must be signed by the head of the organization.

Please apply for your accreditation well in advance if a Swiss visa is required, and consult the respective Swiss Consulate regarding Swiss visa application deadlines and documentation required. If a visa attestation letter is required, NGOs in consultative status with ECOSOC are requested to address a letter to the United Nations Office at Geneva NGO Liaison Officer (email: ungeneva.ngoliaison@unog.ch, fax: +41 22 917 05 83). Other civil society actors should address a letter to the Secretariat (socialforum@ohchr.org).

When there is a large number of NGOs seeking to participate in a session, the Secretariat may limit the number of accredited participants per delegation with access to the plenary room. Please indicate in your accreditation request whether you seek access to the plenary or a parallel event.



Attending the Social Forum



The Social Forum takes place at Palais des Nations, United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG), Switzerland.

Before attending the meeting, all participants are required to obtain a photo identity badge from the UNOG Safety and Security Section at:

**Palais des Nations - Security entrance
Pregny Gate, 8 - 14 Avenue de la Paix
1211 Geneva 10**

Open Monday to Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Participants must present to the Safety and Security Section

- 1) An identity document with picture (i.e. a valid passport);
- 2) The duly completed Conference Registration Form mentioned above;
- 3) A copy of the letter of request for accreditation.

Upon presentation of the above documents a photo identity badge valid for the duration of the session will be issued. Participants in possession of an annual or temporary photo identity badge issued by UNOG Security and Safety Section, and valid for the duration of the session, will have access to the conference rooms.

All travel related-expenses, accommodation, medical insurance and other arrangements are the responsibility of the participants.



Participation in General



Access to the Public Gallery

The public gallery is located above the main conference room to accommodate persons wishing to observe the proceedings without being accredited as participants (e.g. students and academics). The public gallery has a limited number of seats.

Access to the public gallery will be granted depending on the availability of seating and other circumstances.

Individuals or groups who wish to observe the meeting are required to send a request to the Secretariat (socialforum@ohchr.org) at least one week before the session with the following information:

- ▶ Date of the visit;
- ▶ Purpose of the visit; and
- ▶ Full names of the observers.



Documentation and Resources



The documentation and resources related to the Social Forum can be found at:



<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Poverty/SForum/Pages/SForumIndex.aspx>

Copies of documents that form the basis of meeting discussions may be collected from the document desk at Door 40 of the Palais des Nations.

IT Arrangements

Wi-fi access is available in the meeting room and generally throughout public areas of the Palais des Nations. Computer terminals are available near the Serpentine Bar.

Access to UN premises and the plenary room

Palais des Nations is accessible to accredited participants from 8 a.m.

Participants must comply with the requests and instructions of United Nations officials and security staff relating to access and use of United Nations facilities and premises.

Participants must display their badge visibly at all times when entering and exiting, and while present on United Nations premises.

Participants may be subjected to security scrutiny. Access to the United Nations premises with large luggage is not permitted.

On occasions of increased demand for participation in a specific meeting, the Secretariat may limit the number of accredited participants per NGO delegation having access to the plenary room. In lieu, any additional NGO participants not being given access to the plenary will have access to the public gallery, or alternate arrangements will be made, as required.

Smoking is not permitted in the Palais des Nations. Eating and drinking are not permitted in the plenary and side-event meeting rooms.

Use of visual recording equipment is not permitted in the Palais des Nations, except within NGO side-events (see below).



Other important information



Media

NGOs are not permitted to hold press conferences in UN premises. Press briefings, and dissemination of press releases and media advisories by NGOs may be arranged only through the Association of Correspondents Accredited to the United Nations (ACANU), acanu.secretary@gmail.com.

NGO materials

NGO material (e.g. leaflets, publications, boards, banners, etc) that is relevant to the theme considered by the Social Forum may be posted or displayed only on the tables and boards clearly marked for this purpose (i.e. outside the plenary room).

Distribution of NGO material elsewhere in the Palais des Nations is not permitted, including in the cafeteria and Serpentine Bar, and other public spaces.

Materials containing abusive or offensive language or images are not permitted on United Nations premises.

Material for display should clearly indicate the logo and full name of the concerned NGO.

Side Events

Participants may organize side events to further contribute to discussions relating to the theme of the Social Forum, particularly with a view to sharing information on strategies, activities, and best practices at the country level.

NGO side-events are public meetings, unless otherwise indicated by the organizers; as such, they may be attended by all NGOs, Permanent Mission Representatives, UN Staff and other persons with access to Palais des Nations.

Availability of rooms for side events is limited. Please contact the Secretariat (socialforum@ohchr.org) with detailed information about



the planned side event (purpose, programmes, speakers, sponsors, etc.) for permission and room reservation.

Inside the side-event meeting room relevant NGO material may be made available with the agreement of the organizing NGO. It is the responsibility of the organizing NGO to remove any remaining documentation at the end of the meeting.

Interpretation for NGO side events is not provided by the United Nations. NGOs may bring their own interpreters, if they so wish, and in order to do so, inform the Secretariat ahead of time.

Visual recording by accredited NGO delegates is permitted during side events with the approval of the event organizers and upon written notification to the Secretariat, subject to the following guidelines:

The Chair of the meeting should inform the participants at the start of the meeting that it is being recorded; and

Photography (still and/or video) should not interfere with the sight-lines of other delegates or disrupt the proceedings of the meeting. Tripods should be erected at the sides or the back of the room.

Use of the United Nations emblem

Use of the United Nations emblem on non-official documents and publications, including NGO material is expressly prohibited.

The United Nations flag may not be displayed in meeting rooms where NGOs organize events, except with the authorization of the Secretary-General, requested through the Secretariat.

Further information

Social Forum webpage



<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Poverty/SForum/Pages/SForumIndex.aspx>



Contact us

The Social Forum Secretariat can be contacted at:

 socialforum@ohchr.org

OHCHR's Civil Society Section can be contacted at:

civilsociety@ohchr.org

Tel: +41 22 917 96 56



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Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

Palais des Nations

CH 1211 Geneva 10 – Switzerland

Telephone : +41 (0)22 917 90 00

Fax : +41 (0)22 917 90 08

www.ohchr.org



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