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## **GLOBAL | Dignitaries Support CSW**

Thirty dignitaries from around the world, including Nobel Laureates Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Jose Ramos-Horta, the former President of Timor Leste, have signed a joint letter supporting the appeal for Christian Solidarity Worldwide's (CSW) official United Nations (UN) accreditation.

The UN Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Religion or Belief, Dr. Ahmed Shaheed, and the EU Special Envoy on Freedom of Religion or Belief outside the European Union, Ján Figel, are also signatories to the letter, which was made public April 11.

The UN's Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) will decide whether to grant CSW accreditation during its Coordination and Management Meeting held April 19-21.

ECOSOC consultative status would give CSW independent access to key human rights advocacy platforms at the UN, including the ability to organize side-events independently at fora such as the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) in Geneva.

The letter states: "As one of the few NGOs advocating for FoRB for people of all faiths and none at the UN, the hampering of CSW's ability to participate fully in UN processes also undermines the promotion of this right within the UN system at a time when religious narratives are increasingly impacting the political and social order."

The UK Mission to the UN in New York will appeal to the ECOSOC Committee on February decision by the UN Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations to reject CSW's application for consultative status after repeatedly deferring it since 2009. The NGO Committee comprises 19 UN member states and is tasked with considering applications for consultative status by NGOs and facilitating civil society access to the UN. However, it has repeatedly deferred and even denied consultative status to some human rights NGOs.

The joint letter stresses that, “This deferral and denial of applications threatens democracy within the UN system by undermining accountability, transparency and inclusiveness.”

A letter published April 5 by five UN Special Rapporteurs states that the committee’s working methods “represent undue interference in non-governmental organizations’ access to and in the exercise of their freedom of expression in important international fora.”

David Kaye, the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression; Maina Kiai, the Special Rapporteur on the rights to peaceful assembly and of association, Michel Forst, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders; Rita Iszák-Ndiaye, the Special Rapporteur on minority issues and Dr. Ahmed Shaheed, the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, write that “the continuous and arbitrary deferral of applications or accreditation...contravenes the principles of non-discrimination, equality participation, transparency and accountability enunciated in resolution 1996/31.”

Both letters recommend a reconsideration of CSW’s application for consultative status.

CSW’s Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, “We are deeply grateful to the signatories of these letters and for the continuing support of the UK Mission to the UN for our application. The repeated deferral and ultimate denial of our application by the NGO Committee raises serious questions about its commitment to fulfilling its mandated responsibility to facilitate civil society participation at the UN, and impedes us from contributing fully to the promotion of freedom of religion or belief within the UN system at a time when religious narratives are increasingly impacting global affairs.”