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Letter to Economic and Social Council Members concerning the suspension of accreditation for the Transnational Radical Party NGO

July 12, 2004

Your Excellency,

I write to you regarding an important issue of NGO relations with the United Nations that you will be taking up during the current session of the Economic and Social Council. The General Segment of the Economic and Social Council will take action on a recommendation of the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations (*E/2004/32*) to suspend for the maximum period allowed, three years, the consultative status of the Transnational Radical Party (TRP), an international NGO based in Italy. The vote will likely occur on 21 or 22 July. Human Rights Watch urges you to vote against the recommendation to suspend the TRP.

The Committee on NGOs decided to suspend the TRP on 21 May 2004 by a roll-call vote in which nine members were in favor (*Sudan, Zimbabwe, China Cote d'Ivoire, Cuba, India, Iran, Pakistan and the Russian Federation*); eight were opposed (*Turkey, the United States, Cameroon, Chile, France, Germany, Peru and Romania*); and two abstained (*Senegal and Colombia*).

The suspension was recommended due to arguments made by the representative of observer state Vietnam. Vietnam first lodged a complaint against the TRP in 2002 in response to the accreditation to the TRP's delegation to the fifty-eighth session of the Commission on Human Rights of members of the Montagnard Foundation Inc. (MFI), a United States-based NGO committed to the promotion of the rights of indigenous people. Vietnam considers the MFI to be a separatist organization that uses terrorist tactics. Vietnam's allegation that Mr. Kok Ksor, President of MFI and a member of the TRP Council, is a terrorist remain totally uncorroborated, and Mr. Ksor's name does not appear on any international lists of terrorists. The TRP itself is a diverse organization based on respect for Mahatma Gandhi's ideals and has contributed to the important work of the United Nations since it was granted consultative status in 1995, promoting human rights and democracy throughout the world. Mr. Kok Ksor refuted Vietnam's claims in a statement on MFI's website about the goals of his organization: "No violence, no demands for independence, only human rights and indigenous rights according to international law."

Furthermore, Mr. Kok Ksor has received many invitations to participate in United Nations events, particularly to speak on indigenous populations

issues and the status of Vietnam's ethnic Montagnard minority, which has been persecuted for many years. At the moment, for example, as many as 250 Montagnard refugees in neighboring Cambodia are unable to come out of hiding for fear of deportation. They fled after April demonstrations in Vietnam during which Vietnamese security forces dispersed peaceful protesters using tear gas, electric truncheons and water cannons.

The TRP is a non-violent organization and it has done nothing which, under Part VIII (Suspension and Withdrawal of Consultative Status) of Council Resolution 1996/31, would justify suspension of its consultative status. Over the years, it has worked consistently to draw attention to human rights violations in countries around the world. Human Rights Watch believes that the suspension of consultative status of an NGO because of a single complaint of a member State, whose human rights record that organization has been critical of, would have a very detrimental impact on the relationship between the United Nations and NGOs.

The Secretary-General's Panel of Eminent Persons on United Nations-Civil Society Relations in its report released last month, recommended that the UN de-politicize the accreditation system for NGOs. We urge you to begin this process by voting against the recommended suspension of consultative status of the TRP.

Thank you for your kind attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Joanna Weschler".

Joanna Weschler
U.N. Advocacy Director

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