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Open letter to the Swedish Chairmanship on meaningful participation of civil society organisations in the Global Forum on Migration and Development (Stockholm, 12-16 May 2014)

The civil society organisations signing this letter urge the Swedish Chairmanship of the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) to allow meaningful participation of civil society organisations in all sessions of the GFMD Government Days, which will take place in Stockholm in May 2014.

Since 2007, civil society organisations have consistently demonstrated their willingness to engage constructively with the GFMD process. The Civil Society Days have promoted exchange and constructive dialogue within civil society actors of all sectors worldwide, leading to the formulation of practical recommendations. Additionally, the Civil Society Days have allowed for interaction with governments, also thanks to the open participation of some representatives of governments in the plenary debates of the Civil Society Days and in meetings and roundtables.

Nonetheless, meaningful interaction with governments during the GFMD Government Days is limited to the 'Common Space', a three-hour morning session on the first morning of the Government Days, during which the results and recommendations from the Civil Society Days are usually presented. Civil society representatives have thus been excluded from the bulk of the GFMD sessions.

The civil society organisations signing this letter believe that civil society participation in the Government Days must be strengthened. Such a need was highlighted also in the 2012 GFMD Consolidated Assessment Report, which noted:

'Appropriate arrangements shall be made for the participation of civil society. Interaction with civil society stakeholders has greatly enriched the GFMD process. Such interaction recognizes the need to involve civil society in the debate on migration and development, and should be improved further to foster a more interactive dialogue.'¹

Inter alia, the GFMD Assessment Report recommended that the GFMD Chair and other relevant GFMD governing bodies:

- Improve the format for the 'Common Space', including by making available appropriate time for discussions; and
- In consultations with civil society organisations and other relevant stakeholders, ensure arrangements that allow for more inter-active dialogue; for example, civil society representatives could be allowed to participate in the GFMD Working Groups.²

Increased interaction between governments and civil society within the GFMD would not change the nature of the GFMD as an inter-governmental forum, as governments would remain responsible for the design and implementation of their migration policies. Rather, meaningful civil society participation would enrich the debate and lead to better informed assessment of current practices. As the GFMD itself recognises,

¹ *Consolidated Assessment Paper* – Phase 2 of the GFMD Assessment Process (2012), final draft 30 September 2012, modified by Mauritius and endorsed on 22 November 2012, p5-6.

² *Ibid.*, p6.

'Owing to its state-led nature, the primary purpose of the Forum is to facilitate a constructive dialogue among governments. Yet another important objective is to enhance coherence in policy making and institution building – at the national, regional and international levels - where civil society actors are considered as contributors and partners. Civil society input to GFMD activities and dialogue between governments and civil society is thus recognized as both useful and necessary.'³

In addition, the fact that most GFMD sessions are held behind closed doors mean that it lacks the public transparency and accountability that is expected of such international forums.

To ensure that the Global Forum on Migration and Development operates 'in a transparent and open manner',⁴ the civil society organisations signing this letter urge the Swedish Chairmanship to:

- **Extend the time dedicated to the 'Common Space' to at least two plenary sessions;**
- **Actively encourage the government Chairs of each GFMD Roundtable to invite at least one civil society representative to present the views of civil society to the Roundtable;**
- **Allow civil society representatives to take part as observers in all plenary sessions, Roundtables, Working Groups and other GFMD meetings.**

³ 'Link with the Civil Society', <http://www.gfmd.org/en/process/civil-society>, visited 11.11.2013.

⁴ Summary of the High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development: Note by the President of the General Assembly, UN Doc. A/61/515, 13 October 2006, para21.

Signatories

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Amnesty International

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