The 10th session of the Expert Mechanism on the Right to Development

Item 5 of the Provisional Agenda
Implementation of the mandate and programme of work –
Focused thematic discussion and interactive dialogue
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Engaging the Unengaged: Building inclusive development through a meaningful civil society participation

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Transcript of the statement by Ms. Ana María Suárez Franco,
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Thank you to Madam Valiña for that introduction.

I am Ana María Suárez Franco, FIAN International works chiefly to realize the right to food, from the seed to the food, being the end of product. And FIAN has a vision of a world where we support communities affected and social movements in changing the structural causes of hunger and other injustices. At the heart of that work is, of course, working against oppression and in favor of meaningful free participation, as you mentioned, Madame Valiña.

What I will be presenting here is the fruit of our experience, the fruit of our collective knowledge, not only my own. And I'm certain that many of the other organizations present here also have great knowledge. So, I'm not claiming to be, this is not going to be exclusive.

Recalling that when it comes to engagement, what interests us is talking about participation as a right included in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in other international instruments, and which as a right can be demanded in that respect.

Civil society, as you know, has participated in different ways, very diverse ways throughout the history and the through international development, including with respect to the right to development through monitoring people's realities, advocacy done in terms of public policy, as well as establishing international standards and working to ensure that those standards are properly applied in countries for the benefit of rights holders, men and women. Isn't that work? You not only have the biggest organizations. You have the biggest work teams, but also at the base of the foundation of that work are the grassroots, rural-urban, indigenous groups, youth groups, women. Of course, for us, it's very important. What's very important is the work of communities that have affected grassroots because it is they who are the experts in terms of knowledge of their own realities. And cooperation between those communities, which are often excluded with other actors throughout the chain of influences on governance, local, national, global, is what makes us stronger. For that, cooperation with academia is also relevant, but should not be a substitute for rights holders' knowledge. And we need to work to bolster international solidarity in that respect. That participation not only is it important because in legal instruments say so, connecting with social realities means that we can, that human rights can evolve consistently with the realities of the societies and the new challenges we face in our

societies, which often hit us late. And that's why expertise and knowledge that comes from grassroots level is crucial to provide a timely response to problems. For example, I recall in the case of climate change that already back in 2007, 2008, 2009, communities were giving their own experiences. 2011, 2012, there was much more literature in that respect. And now we've better able to respond on time. Maybe if we listen more initially, we would have made greater progress by now in that respect.

Now I want to try and clarify what barriers, as you asked, there's a vast range of barriers we're seeing right now from small administrative obstacles. For example, not having a batch of people who don't have a passport. They can't, they've never left their country, our politically substantial obstacles when it comes to decisions that are limiting the capacities of different actors in civil society.

A big problem is the lack of information and training when it comes to participation. Often, we have a lot of written information, but it's not sensitive to the cultural needs of peoples. Sometimes it's not sufficient. For example, for people, it's sometimes easy to watch a video or WhatsApp in their own language, and that meets their needs. And that means working with anthropologists, for example, not just with rights experts.

A big barrier is lack of resources. Often we're told, look, go participate, bring people on board, but there's no money to finance participation. And that means that people cannot be in the government spaces where their knowledge would be valuable. There's also lack of time. Sometimes a person perhaps comes from their home, their campesino lands, they travel to a space of governance, and they have a minute and a half to speak about a reality they've lived through for 20 years or that their communities have endured for centuries. So lack of time is a big barrier.

At a bigger scale, this criminalization is a big problem. And we in civil society, we have identified this new model of governance called multi stakeholder-ism as we call it in English, it's a very difficult format for the participation because it may seem democratic and inclusive when all actors, private and governments and CSO's community enter the same fora as if they had the same power, yet the power of those who have the greater economic power always prevails. It intimidates those who come from outside, from the grassroots and even endangers them sometimes. And the voices are muffled even though they there's this impression that they're participating, and that is why this model of multi stakeholder-ism should be deconstructed to see exactly what are the goals of each of the participants and actors in governance processes and to regulate also conflicts of interest that may emerge where private interest prevails over public interest, making a public interest since public interest is meant to be the goal of governance for it.

Therefore, I want to conclude with some recommendations. I think it's important to support meaningful participation through very clear measures such as from financing, providing greater time access mechanisms that are less bureaucratic for people, addressing the needs of rights holders. What's also very important is ensuring participation of women, affected communities, youth, human rights defenders, defenders of the rights of future generations. They themselves cannot be substituted because their voices cannot be substituted. And that means facilitating

those channels of access to governance for it and also means taking into account intersectional and gender-based approach.

Similarly, what's also relevant is respect for self-organization mechanisms of CSOs who work in the public interest. One of the big grievances civil society has at the Summit of the Future was that we were forced to organize in a specific manner, given that civil society, private actors, representatives of states, UN agencies, and often to maintain the independence of our position, we need to define how we organize ourselves. And in that respect, it's very important to protect that autonomy of self-organization especially having clear rules that can stop actors with conflict of interest, imposing themselves as partners in participation and in no case should private actors have a capacity to vetoed norms or procedures that are necessary to protect the human rights, including the right to development.

Funding is important for the finance participation, diverse participation, and also another important aspect is to work on political will of the various public civil servants. What we've seen is that many times community participation is affected. Therefore, the role of civil servants can be very important.

And finally, in conclusion, education for participation using human rights methodologies that involve recognizing people as agents of change and not just as beneficiaries, putting people and the nature in the center through anti-oppressive, anti-patriarchal processes that recognize that they are allowed to claim their rights. And the center, the most important thing at the court should be their dignity.

Thank you.