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General Debate Item 8: Follow Up and Implementation of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action

The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action was a ground breaking achievement and game changer in human rights. Expectations were raised and hope in a better world was revived. Much has been achieved but there are many issues that have also regressed. One of the key developments from that conference was to increase participation of civil society in human rights information gathering, policies, actions and participation at the United Nations.

While the number of organisations in consultative status has increased, there is a sense that the space for civil society participation has shrunk, with fewer and fewer opportunities for NGOs to express themselves in various forums or be able to access various offices.

Human rights is about civil society. Human rights violations affect civil society. If the mechanisms for listening and intervention are not robust, civil society increasingly loses faith in the institutions that are meant to give it hope and support.

We propose that the agenda on the Vienna Declaration incorporate comprehensive audit on civil society participation at various levels, on how to increase it and make civil society interventions effective. It will be useful to know what civil society feels about progress by the UN and what the various organs have done to engage with civil society.