Dear Mr. Secretary-General,

We are deeply concerned that five out of our six written statements submitted for the 41st session were not published by the Secretariat and that we were never informed that the statements were being rejected.

As you know, United Nations Watch is accredited as a non-governmental organization in Special Consultative Status with ECOSOC, actively participating in Human Rights Council sessions by submitting written statements, delivering oral statements and organizing side events.

On 3 June 2019 we submitted six written statements, only one of which was published.

The five statements that were not published are listed below:

2. OHCHR Complicity in China’s Abuse of Dissidents Attending UN Meetings (Agenda Item 4)
3. Call to Review the Appointment of Palestine Rapporteur Michael Lynk (Agenda Item 7)
4. Palestinian Violations of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Agenda Items 7 and 9)
5. Palestinian Violations of the Convention on the Rights of the Child – Education (Agenda Items 7 and 9)

We received no communication from the Secretariat indicating any problem or informing us that the statements would not be published. This was surprising as this was the first time our written statements had not been published without any explanation or comment.

Instead, we only learned by chance about the problem when, in the midst of the session, we noticed that the written statements were not being published on the OHCHR website nor appearing in the daily Order of the Day. At that point we contacted the Secretariat’s NGO Liaison office at hrcngo@ohchr.org to ask for an explanation.
We only received a response a few weeks later, on 12 July 2019, after we had both emailed and called the NGO Liaison office. On the phone, we were told vaguely that the statements were being reviewed by the legal office in New York, due to unspecified “legal questions.”

Then, on 30 July 2019, we received a short email from the NGO Liaison Office quoting from ECOSOC Resolution 1996/31 in regard to written statements, and stating the following:

> We therefore draw your attention to the need for written statements submitted to be relevant to the work of the Human Rights Council. Your organization is also reminded that…written statements containing personal attacks against individuals are not in order.

This general email failed to identify any specific problem or concern with any of the five unpublished written statements and we do not understand what it refers to.

We must assume, based on the email, that the written statements were effectively rejected. This is alarming. Hundreds of written statements of all kinds are published for each session, and our statements were no less qualified than these. Moreover, if the Secretariat is rejecting statements, at a minimum it should advise the NGO of the specific objections and allow the NGO an opportunity to address the issues in time for the statements to be published during the relevant session. NGOs should not be made to guess the Secretariat’s objections.

Any other approach infringes on NGO rights and appears to be a form of censorship. In this regard, we note that one of our unpublished written statements detailed a joint petition endorsed by more than 100 NGOs regarding NGO rights being disrespected at the Human Rights Council.

As no specific objections have been raised with respect to any of our written statements, we ask that they be published forthwith.

We look forward to continued collaboration with the Secretariat in our mission to uphold the principles of the United Nations Charter and protect human rights for all.

Sincerely,

Dina Rovner
Legal Advisor