**Submission to the Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (CESCR) for the consideration of its preparation of a list of issues (LoI) at its upcoming 71st pre-sessional working group session (17 to 21 October)**

**8 August 2022**

International Communities Organisation (ICO), in the special consultative status with ESOSOC since 2021, believes communities can come together and achieve a peace, based not on one group’s views prevailing over another, but by constructing a shared vision for a better future.

We are independent, neutral and dedicated to the protection of human rights and giving a voice to those who need it.

We know that peace cannot be imposed from above, and that only communities themselves can determine what peace within their own societies looks like' At the same time, any lasting settlement requires the involvement of political leaders. It also needs equality and respect, if one side is not to be disadvantaged. That is why we work in three ways.

**We bring Communities together**, recognising that solutions are best found through working collectively and building bridges at the grassroots.

This includes organising events, activities and meetings for children and young people, women, the business community and other groups to help them better understand each other and discover their common humanity.

We offer a place where representatives of divided communities around the world can meet and learn from each other. This exchange enables them to develop practical cross-community solutions at the local level.

 We **tackle inequalities in Societies** that can be a driver for conflict. We do this through helping minority and disadvantaged groups to develop social, cultural and political opportunities so that they can be seen as equals.

By tackling wealth disparities and providing opportunities for personal and community development through projects that promote greater access to education, employment and investment in key sectors such as services and infrastructure, we can have a positive impact on quality of life and remove key barriers to peace.

We **support Diplomatic discussions** at the highest level, mediating disputes, building trust and providing the space people need to address their issues positively and constructively. By providing a private, open environment for individuals to hold conversations and build trust, we can help people arrive at innovative and practical solutions to protracted problems. The aim is to develop workable agreements which will change the status quo and allow the communities to heal together.

Such a process requires all sides to have the skills and tools they need to represent the interests of their communities because representatives of minority and disadvantaged groups may lack these. We support them through access to advice from legal experts, academics and other diplomats, so they can better find a fair and pragmatic path to peace.

In Cyprus, we are supporting locally born initiatives that improve Cypriot responses to conflict by establishing and facilitating the program and activities of the Cyprus Peace and Dialogue Centre, which is a unique bi-communal initiative. CPDC brings together key stakeholders, leading personalities and organisations from the two main communities in Cyprus, to revisit and build on existing mechanisms, and find new creative modalities for long-lasting peace. It is our belief that a comprehensive settlement must be achieved through a holistic approach, and will present a vision of peaceful coexistence to the region.

**General Overview of the situation**

ICO’s mission includes advocacy on behalf of economic, social and cultural rights, within the context of our critical work in geographies we are active. ICO considers that it is worth providing an overview of the current economic, social and cultural conditions in the Republic of Cyprus (RoC). It has been estimated that approximately 150,000 Greek Cypriots living in the North and 50,000 Turkish Cypriots living in the South that respectively moved either side of the border[[1]](#footnote-1). The segregation of the island led to the separation of communities and families, and residents became internally displaced with thousands of people going missing during the conflict and ‘relocation’ periods.

The destruction of properties including cultural sites encouraged the division of culture, cultivated the culture of victimisation [[2]](#footnote-2)and also re-shaped the new policy perceptions that implement economic, social and cultural rights. It is also necessary to be aware of the fact that ‘Greek’ and ‘Turkish’ perceptions cannot be homogenised, as significant disparities exist between these communities.

ICO works to support peace and reconciliation globally. We employ a bottom up approach, working collaboratively with locally based teams to lean on the local knowledge of the current situation to prepare the list of issues. Much of the issues listed are a result of CPDC’s activities and consultations:

**ISSUES AND QUESTIONS RELATING TO THE GENERAL PROVISIONS OF THE COVENANT**

**Article 2(2). Non-discrimination**

ICO expresses its concerns regarding the characterised tension and conflict due to the diametrically opposed interests of Greek-Cypriots on the one hand, and the Turkish-Cypriots on the other. People who are displaced or returned to neighbourhoods where they experience ethnic discrimination.

* 1. ICO has reported that the government delayed and/or denied citizenship applications of the children of Turkish Cypriots married to Turkish Citizens.
	2. CPDC reported that some Turkish Cypriots’ citizenships have been revoked arbitrarily.
	3. CPDC reported that despite being one of the two official languages of the RoC, alongside Greek, the Turkish language is often not employed by state services and therefore Turkish Cypriots are often excluded from use of services, access to opportunities and news, which impacts the enjoyment of other economic, social and cultural rights.

Questions:

* Please outline measures the government has taken to prevent, diminish and eliminate formal and substantial discrimination against Turkish Cypriots?
* Please outline the actions the government has taken to investigate revocation of citizenship and and measures that ensure the occurrence of anti-discrimination actions
* Please outline concrete plans to include the Turkish language into public services and official communication.

**Article 9 Right to social security**

ICO is concerned that there is a lack of harmonised national legislation on social benefits such as pensions. CPDC received reports that after passing away, the spouses of Turkish Cypriots who have worked in the RoC for any number of years, if married after 1974, are not entitled to their pensions as would normally be the case.

**Questions:**

* Please describe RoC’s plans to collect and analyse such cases and indicate specific measures that the government has taken to receive their social benefits regardless of their ethnicity.
* Please indicate RoC’s plans to implement anti-racism training for civil servants.

**Article 13 Right to education**

Educational reforms that can enable stronger unified sense of community, collective remembering and encourage more inclusive perspectives in the island remains a contested area.

ICO is concerned that entering into a nationalist rhetoric loop will exacerbate discrimination and perpetuate othering in the island. We therefore urge the need to revisit education systems and textbooks that resurging the conflict and perpetuate its prejudices through the teaching of national history, and the ‘dogma of the Cyprus problem[[3]](#footnote-3)

It would be necessary to eliminate discrimination at all levels and prevent constructing oppositional group identities. Moreover, despite the fact that reforms have been attempted, the change in content of the history taught is only one component – too often it is neglected that the teachers themselves may be perpetuating their own views or limit the effectiveness of reformed historical recounts when their own disbelief of these more pluralistic versions is evident. In this way, youth are socialised into competing group identities that are embedded and reinforced by the tangible legacies of conflict that are inescapable and unavoidable throughout the island. A study conducted in Cyprus[[4]](#footnote-4) showed that teaching and the national environment creates strong trends of correlation for political preference and identity presentation. The effect of the education system transcends young people and the classroom environment, rather it has repercussions throughout society and permeates how knowledge is acquired. In particular museums, such as the museum of national struggle and museum of barbarism perpetuate similar dynamics, wherein the biases behind knowledge production and dissemination are not fully or adequately addressed.

Question

* Please outline the involvement of multiple stakeholders in the design of a bi-communal alternative curriculum and text books that will eliminate discrimination at all levels and prevent constructing oppositional group identities.
1. Snow, A. Aguila, M. Williams, A. *(2021)* ‘*The Cyprus Dispute at A Glance,’* Turkish Heritage Organisation. <https://www.turkheritage.org/en/publications/factsheets/issue-briefs/the- cyprus-dispute-at-a-glance-3300> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Hensinger, S. (2010) ‘*The History of the Cyprus Conflict: A Background with Peace Building Strategies, ’* Daily Kos. https://www.dailykos.com/stories/2010/2/20/839037/->

 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Eleftherios, M. (2015)*’Peace-making Strategies in Cyprus: In Search of Lasting Peace*,’ Cambridge Scholars Publisher, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ozgur, S. Koprulu, N. Reuchamps, M. (2019) ‘*Drawing Cyprus: Power-sharing, identity and expectations among the next generation in Northern Cyprus,’* Mediterranean Politics, 24:2, 237-259, DOI: 10.1080/13629395.2017.1404720 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)