
Amnesty International USA

2020 Annual General Meeting Resolutions Packet for On-Line Working Parties

June 5 and 6

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NOTE: Background information was drafted by the National Resolutions Committee with input from the resolution's sponsors, members, the Board, and staff.

WORKING PARTY A: RESOLUTIONS 1 AND 2

Resolution 1: Reinstate the Annual Report

Passed as a Late Resolution at Western Regional Conference

BACKGROUND

The Annual Report (AR) of Amnesty International has been a key document to assist our advocacy work with the State Department and other government organizations, foreign embassies, and other Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs). It has been published every

The Annual Report was suspended in the past year, and a debriefing with AIUSA Global Assembly (GA) delegates on September 5th, 2019 made it clear that there has been no firm decision by the International Secretariat (IS) to reinstate the AR, despite GA support for it.

RESOLUTION LANGUAGE:

BE IT RESOLVED that the AIUSA Board requests the IS and the International Board to reinstate publication of the Annual Report, and to advocate strongly within the international movement for such reinstatement, until such time as data on its use and usefulness has been gathered and analyzed, and unless that analysis demonstrates clearly that it should not continue.

ARGUMENTS FOR

The Annual Report is an important document prepared by Amnesty International and used by organizations worldwide in support of human rights. If the Report is not continued, AI will lose a vital form of communication that educates governments, NGOs, and individuals about the violations of human rights around the world.

ARGUMENT AGAINST

AI's Annual Report has become a behemoth of a publication. In English, last year's report was over 400 pages long, and much of the report was also published in more than 20 other languages. Generating the report is an expensive task requiring a major commitment of international staff, and the resources can be better used to publicize human rights violations using other means of communication.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

The publications of the Annual Report requires every Section to respond, for example with a press release, a press conference, and/or delivery to embassies and other government officials. For AI International the publication costs would be considerable, but unknown at this time.

Resolution 2: Shared Leadership In Conference Planning

Passed at Mid-Atlantic Regional Conference

BACKGROUND

Planning for AIUSA's five Regional Conferences (RCs) has taken different forms over the years. Before 2008, planning was led primarily by staff in each of the five regional offices. After regional offices were abolished or converted to different purposes, conference planning was done by an evolving series of ad hoc committees.

In 2019, RCs have been planned by a National Working Group for Regional Conferences, formed in August of 2019, consisting 3 members from each region including 1 from the student network, 1 from the local group network and 1 member from the regional conference host city. Current members of this working group represent Area Coordinators, Student Activist Coordinators, faculty advisors, and local/student group members. Members were first self-selected, then chosen with input from Field Organizers.

Volunteer members have had input into all session options and speakers. Proposal for specific sessions and Action Alley displays were selected based on a scoring rubric (posted online). Selections of host cities has mainly been done by staff, well before more detailed planning begins.

The Planning Committee for the 2020 Annual General Meeting (AGM) is comprised of self-selected member leaders who represent all of AIUSA's member leader groups. It is currently responsible for workshop sessions and Action Alley selection, as stated in the committee description. The committee is also a resource for staff, providing advice planning throughout the AGM planning processes.

This resolution proposes new guidelines for selection of membership in planning committees, and for the responsibilities of the committees. Among other changes, committees be formed much earlier in the planning process, so that volunteer members will be able to weigh in at an early stage on matters such as the selection of host cities and keynote speakers.

RESOLUTION LANGUAGE

[A] WHEREAS committees that plan the AGM and regional conferences have varying responsibilities and do not necessarily represent key member leader groups.

[B] WHEREAS shared leadership in conference planning is the best way to ensure that our conferences meet our members' needs and encourage attendance by creating ownership among members of the agenda.

[C] THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that each AGM and regional conference planning committee shall

(1) plan, in accordance with Shared Leadership Guidelines, the agenda of the conference, including speakers, training workshops, and other programs, consistent with the objectives of these meetings, and advise staff on the conference's timing and host city; and

(2) in deciding on the program for such events, each committee shall implement an open and transparent selection process and consult with member leaders and groups in their areas.

[D] THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the composition of the planning committees shall include, to the extent feasible, nominees from member leader steering committees and other

member leader structures, and reflect a broad range of perspectives, having regard to human rights principles and Amnesty's goals of diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion, and be inclusive of the representation of members in the conference location wherever possible.

ARGUMENTS FOR

AIUSA's Regional Conferences and Annual General Meeting play a crucial role in the organization. They serve to inform, inspire, and train members, and to provide venues for member activists to meet and exchange ideas.

Member leaders can provide value to staff and the Board as they make decisions on RC/AGM dates and locations. Member leaders are closer to those whom we hope to attract to conferences, and they may be more aware than staff of local conditions. While staff have expertise and knowledge unavailable to volunteer members, staff should not be able to make decisions without input at all from planning committees.

Shared Leadership should include decision-making, not just the opportunity of members to participate in discussions. Currently, volunteer members of committees are consulted only after many fundamental decisions have already been made, such as where conferences will take place, or who keynote speakers will be. AGM and RC planning committees should begin work much sooner in the process, before such decisions have been made.

This resolution will ensure that RCs and the AGM will best meet the needs of members. Such a change might well result in an increase of attendance at the meetings.

ARGUMENTS AGAINST

There is no real need for this change in the conference planning committees. Plus, the proposed changes could conceivably make the process more cumbersome, rather than improve it.

The current planning committees already include member leaders, as noted above, and the process has worked well for the 2019 conferences. The committee also includes members from the host cities. The planning process requires a considerable time commitment, and self-selection by members who are specifically interested is much more likely to result in an effective committee than a "nomination" from certain leader groups.

In the case of selecting host cities, we are limited with date selections, and adding additional barriers will make this process more difficult. Selection of cities is also dependent on locating acceptable venues and negotiating contracts with those venues.

In the case of the AGM, when the planning committee reviews and approves workshop sessions, they are at the same time selecting panels, workshops, trainings, and speakers. Additionally, the AGM program committee is asked to weigh in on content for the mainstage sessions (also known as Plenaries). Themes of Plenaries are connected to AI's already existing, organization-wide campaign priorities. However, the planning committee is asked for feedback on content, which in turn informs selection of speakers for the plenaries.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

Resource implications are minimal as these committees already exist in some form and are part of the budget planning for all conference.

WORKING PARTY B: RESOLUTIONS 3 AND 4

Resolution 3: Changing the Deadline to Submit Resolutions

Sponsor: NRC - Passed at Western Regional Conference

BACKGROUND

In Fall 2018 a resolution changing the deadline to submit resolutions was passed at the Western Regional Conference to replace a resolution that had passed at the Spring 2018 AGM, but was subsequently rejected by the Board because of unworkable wording. The replacement (2018) resolution went on to the 2019 AGM, but was not voted on at the Voting Plenary before time for the Plenary expired. Because the Standing Rules for the AIUSA Membership Resolution process can only be changed by a binding resolution passed at the AGM, the Board and the National Resolutions Committee were unable to implement the change.

This resolution seeks to implement the change in the deadline that, the NRC believes, is desired by membership.

Below is the full text of the sections of the Standing Rules this resolution would amend.

3.B.1 “There are two (2) categories of resolutions at the Regional Conference: “properly-submitted” resolutions (“Resolutions”) meeting all submission requirements set forth herein and in the Resolution Guidelines and Submission Form and submitted by the September 1st deadline (September 15th for members of student groups), and “late” resolutions not properly submitted (meeting all requirements) by the established submission deadlines.

RESOLUTION LANGUAGE

[A] **WHEREAS** the number of resolutions members submit and the vibrancy of the resolutions process has declined in recent years.

[B] **THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT** the Standing Rules of the Membership Resolutions Process be amended as follows:

(1) In Paragraph 3.B.1, the language “submitted by the September 1st deadline (September 15th for members of student groups)” shall be changed to read: “submitted no later than twenty-one (21) days before the date of the year's first Regional Conference.”

ARGUMENTS FOR

The current deadlines (September 1 and September 15 (for students)) occur too soon after the summer to allow time for members to submit resolutions, especially if they want to consult others as to the subject. Some members believe the early deadline has contributed to the decline in the number of resolutions in recent years. A resolution passed at the 2018 AGM changed the deadline to 21 days before each Regional Conference, a decision the Board overturned. This proposal

changes the deadline to 21 days before the first Regional Conference, which creates a simpler, uniform deadline that should be easier to implement,

ARGUMENT AGAINST

Though the NRC believes it is possible to prepare a resolutions packet within the 21-day timeline, the resolution would produce what is in fact just a 14-day time line, since the NRC has to allow time for printing and distribution for the first regional conference. This contracted deadline may lead to a less complete analysis of the background and arguments presented in the resolution packages.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

This resolution would not have a significant effect on the resources currently allocated to the resolutions process. The only extra resources would be the time commitment of the NRC members and other volunteers

Resolution 4: Experimentation with Standing Rules for Resolutions:

Sponsored by NRC; passed at Western, Northeast, Mid-West and Mid-Atlantic Regional Conferences

BACKGROUND

In recent years the years there have been a number of discussions throughout AIUSA about the process for submission and approval of resolutions. This process is governed by our “Standing Rules for the AIUSA Membership Resolutions Process” (MRP – see attachment to this Packet, below). The MRP specifies that changes to the process may be altered only by a Binding Resolution passed at the Annual General Meeting (AGM). The NRC believes that the resolution process can be improved, to make it more user friendly and less regimented, and that there should be some leeway to experiment with alternate or additional rules at Regional Conferences (RCs) and the AGM in order to improve the resolutions process. Examples of possible changes include changes in our use of Robert’s Rules of Order in Voting Plenaries and Working Parties, accepting new resolutions as late as RCs, and/or accepting and making modifications to the proposed resolutions between the RCs and AGM. The NRC would like to be able to experiment with the process and solicit feedback from members, Board, and staff on these experiments, with the goal of making resolution process more consistent with memberships needs.

This resolution limits changes the NRC may make to MRP to items of Principles and Process laid out in sections 1, 2, 3, 6 and 8 of the MRP. It does not allow the NRC to alter section Sections 4 or 5, establishing quorums or voting eligibility. It also leaves in place section 7, which explains the requirements of the Board of Directors to implement or reject resolutions passed at the AGM, and section 8, which specifies that members in good standing may submit amendments to the MRP. We believe it is important to maintain the sections on voting and requirements on how the Board of Directors is required to act on Resolutions, in order to maintain the integrity of the voting system while we experiment with changes.

RESOLUTION LANGUAGE:

WHEREAS The National Resolutions Committee (NRC) would like to be able to experiment with current rules for submitting and approving resolutions (the Standing Rules For The AIUSA Membership Resolutions Process or MRP) in order to increase participation of members in governance and to promote a more robust discussion of human rights issues and AIUSA procedures at our conferences;

AND WHEREAS the current MRP requires approval at the AGM Voting Plenary, and by the Board of Directors, for any changes to the MRP;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the NRC, with the approval of the Board of Directors, may suspend any part of the MRP except: Section 4. Voting, Section 5. Quorum, Section 7. Board of Directors, or Section 8, Amendments to the Standing Rules, for a period of up to three years, and to propose new rules in place of the suspended parts;

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AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the NRC will solicit feedback from members, staff, and the Board about the effects of any such new rules, and report back to the Board of Directors to summarize that feedback;

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that temporary rules created in this manner will expire unless they are formally approved, as permanent amendments to the MRP, by a vote at the Voting Plenary of the AGM and by the Board of Directors within three years following such suspension of the rules.

ARGUMENTS FOR

The resolution process has been under great scrutiny in recent years. In some cases, debates have been confusing, resolutions passed at Working Parties have not been voted on in the Voting Plenary, and many members have felt disenfranchised by the process, which has led to apathy and low participation in Working Parties and Voting Plenaries. Because the MRP can only be altered by a binding resolution passed at the AGM, any potential changes take a minimum of a year to implement. The NRC believes the process can be improved if we can experiment with possible alterations to the process to make it more user friendly and efficient, then seek feedback from members, the Board, and staff on these experiments. We want to find out what works and how the membership can be better engaged in the resolution process, and at the same time be able to abandon changes that have not worked without going through the formal process required for permanent changes. The current situation, when the AGM has been moved online, is another argument in favor of experimentation, as the resolutions process needs to be adapted on short notice if Regional Conferences cannot be held in person in Fall, 2020

ARGUMENT AGAINST

This resolution violates principles of democracy and shared leadership, by allowing the NRC and Board to make changes to the resolution process. It would place too much power in a small group and in effect disenfranchise members. Changes to the MRP requires AGM approval in order to prevent the Board of Directors from controlling this democratic process, and this resolution would allow the Board and the NRC to bypass those safeguards. The resolutions process is not broken; it has worked for many years. The problem with the process is a lack of proper implementation of the standing rules.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

This resolution would not have a significant effect on the resources currently allocated to the resolutions process. The only extra resources would be the time commitment of the NRC members and other volunteers