



CoNGO Board - May 6-7, 2010 - New York
Report of the First Vice President

1. The First Vice President has several specific responsibilities assigned to the post in the CoNGO Rules. I shall group most of my report under the headings of two of those responsibilities.
2. In terms of the requirement to "assist and act for the President as spokesperson for the Conference" I may mention
 - a. I held an Information Session for the NGO Community in Geneva soon after the two CoNGO sessions in Vienna last November: the Board and the CSDF 2009 Vienna Briefing. This well-attended session enabled Geneva-based NGO representatives to get the flavour of the two Vienna events, to seek clarifications, and to give their views on several aspects of follow-up. As with many CoNGO meetings, the session was an occasion to clear up some misapprehensions.
 - b. I intend to hold a similar Information Session in Geneva (probably on June 16) to provide briefing on the CSDF 2010 New York Component, on the current Board discussions, and on the "Kamal Town Hall meeting".
 - c. I have given support to the young people's initiative known as MAKING COMMITMENTS MATTER (MCM) - an initiative strongly backed by WFUNA. MCM is the collective brainchild of a large group of young professionals, young academics, young activists - many of them engaged in national UN Associations in some 40 countries. MCM acknowledged the situation on which so many NGOs work, namely that so often governments do not implement the Treaties, Conventions and other commitments they have freely entered into - do not, in short, honour their promises. Thereupon, MCM selected certain UN programmatic areas and established a detailed data base on fulfilment, or not, of each commitment, providing a factual basis for focussed civil society advocacy vis-a-vis governments to close the gaps. MCM will launch an electronic UN information network at an international conference in Geneva later this month, and I shall be speaking there.
 - d. Naturally I also participate, schedules permitting, in UN events, CoNGO Committees and related gatherings where I can mention the work of CoNGO.
 - e. I have also joined in the planning of WORLD HUMANITARIAN DAY fixed by the UN General Assembly as August 19 each year. You will recall that on August 19, 2003 Sergio Vieira de Mello (UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and UNSRSG in Iraq) was killed with 22 others in the atrocious attack on the UN building in Baghdad. World Humanitarian Day is marked around the globe, with a major event in Geneva, and I give as much assistance as time permits.



3. The second responsibility I am given by the Rules is to "work closely with the President in order to accomplish the aims of the Conference". Under this heading I may cite:

a. I am engaged in routine or sensitive personnel or "protocol" matters affecting the functioning of CoNGO. Being based in Geneva I am available for consultations with the Geneva Office staff. I take this opportunity to affirm to all the Board how well served CoNGO is by the Geneva staff who work intense, even excessive, schedules. The staff are the first to suffer from our recurrent financial shortfalls, including not receiving their salaries on time, and I thank them for their manifest and deep commitment.

b. Clearly "working with the President" includes on our flagship event, the CSDF. In recent months this of course meant being deputy chair of the International Steering Committee for the New York CSDF Component, and in coming months I shall be leading the process for the Geneva Component. We are aiming to hold this in the period September 29, 30 and October 1.

4. There is one special First Vice President role I must report to the Board.

This concerns the Geneva-based Association FRIENDS OF CONGO, which is roughly parallel to the CoNGO Foundation in New York and the CoNGO Verein in Vienna. These bodies exist in the frame of Rule 59 authorizing "the establishment...of foundations or trust funds". I alerted the Board at the November 2009 Session that the Association FRIENDS OF CONGO had itself recognized that in its eight years of existence it had never found any means of raising funds, providing services, organizing events, or otherwise simply being of particular use to CoNGO. (The sole exception was being able to contribute to the installation in Geneva of the Eleanor Roosevelt Plaque on the occasion of UDHR 60.)

Contrary to the legal situation in the US and Austria, a separate legal entity is not required under Swiss law to enable CoNGO as such to receive external funds or acquire tax exemptions. After extensive discussions, the Association FRIENDS OF CONGO at its regular Assembly last month decided simply to put itself to sleep; phrased more formally, to suspend the Association until further notice. This enables future CoNGO Officers (who by statute form the core of the Association's Committee) to decide in future years if they find it appropriate to "reawaken the Sleeping Beauty".

5. Finally, I quote another CoNGO Rule under which I believe the CoNGO First Vice President has an unequivocal responsibility, namely our fundamental aim of "strengthening the relationship between NGOs and the United Nations, including...promoting the principles, purposes and effectiveness of the UN and its related agencies and programmes". I have the privilege of being entrusted by some NGOs with the duty to follow UN activities in several different areas (sustainable development, environment, democracy, humanitarian policies...). I thus have the opportunity and the honour to promote CoNGO's



principles and potentialities in every one of those areas, and I commit to pursuing these challenges for the remainder of my term of office.

Cyril Ritchie
CoNGO First Vice President
c.ritchie@fiig.org
T. +4122-733.6717
F. +4122-734.7082