



**23rd General Assembly of the
Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations
in Consultative Relationship with the
United Nations (CONGO)**

Geneva, 05 – 07 December 2007

***"Moving from Consultation to Partnership in Promoting
Rights and Responsible Governance at all Levels"***

CALL FOR ACTION

Table of Contents

I.	Introduction	2
II.	UN: Peace, Gender, Development, Human Rights	3
(i)	Peace and Human Security	3
(ii)	Gender Equality and Gender Justice	3
(iii)	Human Development and Climate Change – Environmental Crisis	4
(iv)	Human Rights	5
III.	Civil Society: Empowerment, Solidarity and Governance	6
(i)	NGO Solidarity with Victims of Violence	6
(ii)	NGO Role in Sharing and Sustaining Resources	6
(iii)	NGO Promoting Vision and Responsibility	7

I. Introduction

1. We, nearly 300 participants of the 23rd General Assembly of the Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations (CONGO), representing some 140 non-governmental organizations (NGOs)/civil society organizations (CSOs) from 40 countries of all regions of the world [including more than 50 participants from Africa, Asia and Latin America], gathered in Geneva, Switzerland, from 5 to 7 December 2007.

2. The **overall theme** for the debates during this General Assembly was: **"Moving from Consultation to Partnership in Promoting Rights and responsible Governance at all Levels"**. The members of CONGO also proceeded, as foreseen in the association's Rules, with the election of its new President and its new Board.

3. That overall theme had been selected to reflect CONGO's ongoing efforts in promoting human rights and responsible pro-poor-oriented governance in its dialogues with the United Nations System and UN member governments, as well as with the community of civil society organizations. CONGO's General Assembly theme thus followed up on the themes of the African Civil Society Forum held in March 2007 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia – *"Democratizing Governance at Regional and Global Level to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals"* – and the Civil Society Development Forum convened in Geneva in June 2007 – *"A Platform for Development: Countdown to 2015"*.

4. The General Assembly was opened by the President of CONGO and subsequently addressed by the Director-General of the UN Office at Geneva (UNOG), as well as by the Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the Office of the United Nations and Other International Organizations in Geneva, the UN Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Delegate of the Geneva Government for "International Geneva Relations". The opening keynote statement was delivered by the President of the UN Human Rights Council.

5. Participants also noted the encouraging words in the greetings of the Chair of the DPI NGO Executive Committee, the Chief of UNOG's NGO Liaison Office in Geneva and the Acting NGLS Coordinator. The General Assembly was closed with a Call for Action elaborated by CONGO's members.

6. One of the central objectives of the General Assembly consisted in providing a venue for an in-depth discussion of two sets of sub-themes emanating from the above overall theme. Thus, under **Track I**, the keynote presentations and subsequent interactive roundtables focused on the **linkage of civil society activities with those of the United Nations in the areas of peace, gender, development and human rights**. The keynote presentations and roundtables under **Track II** examined the **role of civil society organizations in promoting empowerment, solidarity and governance** with a view to helping them strengthen such activities further.

7. The conclusions of the General Assembly, together with its recommendations on each of the sub-themes, will be discussed – for the purposes of strengthened interaction – with those entities of the United Nations System whose work is of particular relevance in the context of the future strategies of CONGO and its member organizations. It will also be discussed with UN member governments as a follow-up to the dialogue with them that was reinvigorated during the High-Level Segment of ECOSOC's Substantive Session in July 2007. The community of civil society organizations thus intends to provide constructive contributions to the preparation of ECOSOC's next Substantive Session in July 2008.

8. We, the participants of CONGO's 23rd General Assembly, also need to emphasize that we all came from countries with different cultures and different levels of social and economic development. Despite the manifold differences between us, the General Assembly provided us with the opportunity to discuss our common concerns and aspirations, to forge partnerships and build up solidarity across regions and continents, and to promote the goals of peace, human rights, decent work, justice, and equitable and sustainable development.

II. UN: Peace, Gender, Development, Human Rights

(i) Peace and Human Security

9. We urgently call on those civil society organizations focusing on the issues of and interrelationship between peace and human security to proceed with their 'self-organization' and to achieve greater unity of purpose. Globally operating civil society organizations should **pursue a stronger pro-active approach in taking critical, sustainable and non-violent paths to safeguard and strengthen the three interrelated freedoms: freedom from fear, freedom from want, and freedom to live in dignity.**

10. We call on global civil society to strengthen, as a top priority, its lobbying and other means of pressure in the **pursuit of disarmament** directed at ABC weapons. Such lobbying and pressure also need to be deployed in opposing the development of futuristic weapons, and the placing of such weapons in space. We also call for a global treaty to regulate the worldwide conventional arms trade.

11. We insist that **women**, often the victims of violence suffering the greatest harm, must henceforth always **be included in peace processes.**

12. We encourage CONGO to assist, with our support, in the pursuit of the following initiatives:

- The development of a global awareness campaign to **militate against the unacceptable high levels of military expenditure** in the world, and to call for their immediate reduction in favour of much-needed increased social expenditures. The International Peace Bureau (IPB) has been taking the lead in this initiative.
- Assistance in the dissemination and operationalization of the new global **"Responsibility to Protect"** (R2P) norm. Work in this area, especially in the context of the sensitive issue of sovereignty, will require sophisticated and subtle multi-stakeholder dialogues. The World Federalist Movement (WFM) is organizing roundtables in six capitals to facilitate global consultation.
- Operationalizing the R2P norm implies the deployment of a large-scale **'peace force' of civilian unarmed peacekeepers** to provide practical human protection services in areas of armed conflict (or post-conflict situations). The Nonviolent Peaceforce is keen to partner with like-minded civil society organizations to scale up quickly, help reduce human rights violations and/or prevent relapses into violent conflicts.

13. CONGO should organize, in response to our call for support, multi-stakeholder consultations. For this purpose, CONGO should bring in specialist expertise to help establish more aligned multi-actor strategies on several important issues, including the 2010 review of the Non-Proliferation Treaty. **CONGO should advocate a convention on military spending and arms transfer.** Universal Periodic Reviews on disarmament issues should be introduced in assemblies such as the Security Council.

14. CONGO should advocate and help arrange joint meetings of the committees dealing with (i) development and (ii) disarmament issues. **CONGO should also provide assistance** in work to be undertaken to **clarify the links between climate change and imminent or future conflicts.**

15. **CONGO should develop further an effective outreach at regional levels.** It should advocate strategies promoting inclusiveness by helping ensure the participation especially of national-level organizations. Specifically, special fundraising efforts should be made and means of communication improved to facilitate a broader participation of civil society organizations from the Global South in international decision-making, including in that of CONGO.

(ii) Gender Equality and Gender Justice

16. We call on **CONGO to help strengthen advocacy and the participation of NGOs** operating at all levels, including those at grassroots level, **in activities under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)**. The Convention should be promoted as an action tool for the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action.

17. NGOs need to **strengthen advocacy and participation in treaty bodies to promote gender justice** and incorporate the principle of gender integration into that entire system of bodies. Such action entails a clear conceptualization of definitions of gender equality and gender mainstreaming, a formal methodology for implementation of these terms, a training of the treaty body members and a continuing process of performance monitoring by the treaty bodies to ensure accountability by countries under review. In that context, the ILO's fundamental principles on workers rights, including gender equality as a core concept of decent work, need to be emphasized.

18. **CONGO needs to develop strong partnerships with other NGOs to coordinate action in the Human Rights Council**, particularly action focusing on the Universal Periodic Review and the Special Procedures.

19. **CONGO should facilitate campaigning for one UN entity to enable that entity to carry out gender equality and women's rights programmes.** Such campaigning should also assist that entity to obtain adequate resources for carrying out its objectives within the framework of the Beijing Platform for Action and all related instruments. As a general rule, NGOs need to continue such lobbying for promoting gender equality and the protection of women's and men's human rights and empowerment. The "Geneva Advocacy Notes" of CONGO's Geneva Committee on the Status of Women should be brought to the attention of CONGO members with a view to establishing or strengthening partnerships between NGOs and with the UN.

20. **CONGO members should campaign against the feminization of poverty and the exacerbation of its negative consequences for economic development**, especially affecting vulnerable population groups. The root causes of the feminization of poverty should be addressed by taking a two-pronged approach, specifically (i) by mainstreaming gender as a cross-cutting issue, (ii) by identifying the root causes of women being particularly vulnerable to poverty due to multiple forms of discrimination emanating, for example, from religious intolerance and cultural relativism, racial discrimination, and the lack of rights to own land and other assets, and lack of access to financial resources.

21. Gender is not an issue concerning only women but all institutions and processes that have a bearing on entire populations. **Discussions on gender mainstreaming should therefore focus on the differential impacts of legislations and policies on both men and women.**

(iii) Human Development and Climate Change – Environmental Crisis

22. In response to the now undisputed scientific findings by climate change experts and noting the severe consequences for humans, animals and entire ecosystems, we agree that action is needed in three key areas:

Mitigation

23. All governments that have not yet signed the Kyoto Protocol should do so immediately. Moreover, agreement must be reached on a comprehensive, equitable, binding and quota-based framework for the post-Kyoto Protocol period. **Mitigation strategies must be based on a legally binding and enforceable cap on emissions, with allocations of emission quotas based on the principles of equity and justice.** The follow-up agreement must provide developing countries with access to financial resources and technology so that these countries can disconnect constraints on their economic growth from constraints due to rising carbon emissions. We recognise that new jobs will be created as a result of climate

change. Environmental and social values and gains can be strengthened as a result of the creation of jobs in the sustainable energy sector.¹

Adaptation

24. **Developed countries must provide**, on a compensatory basis, **the funding** (in addition to the existing target commitment of 0.7 percent of gross national income) **and technology needed to enable the poorest countries to adapt to the effects of climate change**, especially to such effects in the areas of agriculture, water and disaster preparedness. Sustainable animal care must form part of adaptation strategies to avoid endangering human cultures. Women and civil society must play leading roles in the design and implementation of mitigation policies and adaptation strategies. These must include an agreed framework for action to create jobs and new commercial opportunities.

Access to energy

25. **High-income countries must support the efforts of developing countries to provide sufficient and efficient energy to everyone.** Such energy should be generated by clean and sustainable sources, in which governments must invest. High-income countries have a particular responsibility to help develop and transfer alternative technologies to poorer countries to enable them to pursue low-carbon development strategies.

26. We therefore call on CONGO to support and contribute to the following actions:

- Climate change threatens to reinforce existing inequalities, especially between women and men, and between North and South. **It is critical, therefore, that civil society is guided in its work on climate change by the principles of justice and equality.**
- We support the already existing dialogue between civil society, governments and industry. Civil society participates in a number of inter-governmental dialogues. Such dialogues must be continued. Furthermore, we must continue to ensure that the right players are present at negotiations.
- We recognise that the impact of climate change is on the agenda of a number of UN agencies. **NGOs working in areas in which climate change will have an impact** (e.g. HIV/AIDS, TB and malaria, migration, employment, food security, housing, clothing) **should integrate their work and advocacy on climate change issues into their overall advocacy work with the UN.**
- Civil society, encompassing NGOs, *inter alia*, social movements, women's organisations, farmers' movements, animal welfare organisations, should **work with a wide range of key stakeholders** including: UN agencies (e.g. ILO, UNEP), industries, employers, governments, investors and trade unions.
- **CONGO needs to enhance its role and capacity to carry out effective political advocacy** and effect change by targeting tailored messages at the varied actors involved. We must understand the importance of strategic planning and focus on the whole range of international/UN meetings that are making decisions relating to climate change.
- **The CONGO Board and committees should help to think through how best CONGO can contribute to mainstreaming the issue of climate change within the CONGO organization and structures** and facilitating the development of strategies. We suggest that CONGO committees bring the issue of climate change into their meetings and the meetings they have with their stakeholders.
- **We should utilise the facilities that the DPI NGO process** (as mandated by the 2007 DPI NGO Conference) **offers in terms of civil society discussions, to make concrete proposals for action on climate change.** <www.climatecaucus.net> is a tool that allows civil society to identify what it is now being done to fight climate change - and what more must be done in the areas of clean-up, risk reduction and advocacy. Working Groups will manage the effort by focusing on areas particularly under the impact of climate change: e.g. gender, wildfires, animal welfare, water and indigenous people. The analysis will be transformed into recommendations to be

¹ NEP press Release, Silver Lining to Climate Change – Green Jobs

submitted in a report to the UN Secretary General. He agreed to receive these in about twelve months. Climatecaucus.net will also be a permanent location to stimulate the creation of new networks and facilitate networking among networks in order to maximize collaboration throughout our global community.

- Organisations working with youth are in particular invited to help **develop the website pages on youth.**
- **NGOs and scientists should collaborate to find equitable solutions with a view to ensuring quality of life in the community and the peoples of this world.** For that purpose, we recommend (i) to develop cooperation mechanisms between civil society and science to guarantee that vital innovations in science and technology (ultimately paid by taxpayers and through other funding arrangements) serve in priority the peoples of the world; and (ii) to refine and enhance the human rights framework to allow access and implementation to all.

(iv) Human Rights

27. Using the opportunity of the 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, **CONGO should promote a campaign for the universal ratification of major UN human rights treaties and conventions and ILO core labour standards**, as well as the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders; join in the DPI Paris celebrations; and encourage members to initiate or assist national/local support programmes. CONGO should play a facilitating role in the process leading to the Durban Review Conference.

28. **CONGO, in observing closely the work and performance of the UN Human Rights Council, including its Universal Periodic Review process, should use its committees and project staff to continue training and disseminating communications**, particularly with regard to that Review and the strengthening of accountability in the implementation of human rights instruments. CONGO should also help enhancing the participation of NGOs in the Council, for example by backing joint statements and furthering advocacy. CONGO is supportive and appreciative of the work of the Civil Society Unit of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

29. New challenges need to be addressed, such as **priority for the concerns of the poor and the disabled, protection of the environment, promotion of the human rights dimension of the Millennium Development Goals, and interreligious/intercultural understanding and cooperation**. CONGO should therefore advocate calls in support of human rights accountability with regard to environmental and development concerns and interreligious/intercultural understanding and cooperation, for example in backing or initiating follow-up to UN Decade reviews on such issues.

30. We call on CONGO **to promote human rights education** at all levels, ranging from UN agency global levels to the local levels of communities. Priority in such undertaking should be given to meeting children's needs and to developing strategies that meet teachers' needs. To that end, CONGO should support the conduct of a Civil Society Forum on Human Rights Education and Learning to be held in 2009.

31. **CONGO should promote the implementation of human rights standards, by involving all NGOs concerned**, irrespective of their focus on or reference in their title to human rights and their emphasis on the need for action at national or local levels to further prevention and protection. To that end, CONGO should explore the further extension of experience-sharing and communication. CONGO should also advocate training programmes that support/create an interdisciplinary "training space" or "academy" allowing for regional outreach.

II. Civil Society: Empowerment, Solidarity and Governance

(i) NGO Solidarity with Victims of Violence

32. We call on all actors to engage in:

- the **promotion of victim-centred policies and fora** where the voices of the victims should be heard, where the victims can propose solutions to their causes, and where they should be part of decision-making;
- empowerment of victims through:
 - **economic empowerment**, e.g. by providing access to decent conditions of work and promoting initiatives such as offering micro-credit to women;
 - education in general and, specifically, **human rights education for the victims** to enable them to know what their rights are, to enjoy legal empowerment;
- **holding governments accountable** both domestically and internationally, and urge them to **provide protection to all people within their territories**, regardless of such peoples' legal status of residence;
- **challenging** those social and cultural **customs and norms that often lead to violence**;
- **rejecting the culture of violence**; and
- **promoting solidarity among peoples and victims of violence**; such acts of promoting should be done in a more coordinated manner.

33. We call on CONGO to:

- **provide space or a forum for victims of violence** where they can discuss strategies and solutions focusing on the causes of such violence;
- **advocate and campaign for international solidarity with victims of human rights violations**, such as the campaign for the implementation and ratification of international human rights standards and related commitments; and
- **promote human rights education** as a means of prevention and of empowerment of victims of human rights violations.

(ii) NGO Role in Sharing and Sustaining Resources

34. CONGO's work should help ensure a **better and strengthened cooperation between NGOs from the South and NGOs from the North**.

35. CONGO should work with the ECOSOC Secretariat to **strengthen the participation and voices of NGOs in the Annual Ministerial Review of ECOSOC's High Level Segment** and similarly enhance civil society's performance in a follow-up process at the national level.

36. **CONGO should give strong support to its committees** dealing with issues related to **Financing for Development and Sustainable Development**.

37. **CONGO should ensure greater participation of NGOs in and closely follow the processes leading to conferences of major importance for NGOs in 2008**, in particular the annual meetings of ECOSOC with the Bretton Woods Institutions and WTO (taking place in April 2008 in New York), the first Development Cooperation Forum during the High-Level Segment of ECOSOC's Substantive Meeting (in early July 2008 in New York), which will be preceded by a CONGO-organized NGO Forum), the Doha Review Conference on Financing for Development (30 November – 4 December 2008) and the OECD/DAC High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness (2-4 September 2008 in Accra).

38. Civil society must continue to urge governments to reach their 0.7 percent ODA/GNI targets, it being understood that such aid should be genuine and that its quality be improved. Civil society must further strengthen its call on governments and international institutions to **improve the accountability pertaining to aid flows** at national and international levels. Civil society should use the opportunities in 2008 (CSW, Accra, Doha meetings) to do so.

(iii) NGO Promoting Vision and Responsibility

39. We call for the consideration of:

- (a) Shared values: **CONGO should promote the values of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights** and call for their actual implementation by governments, UN agencies and civil society.
- (b) Role of Civil Society: **The Civil Society organizations have to retain their independence and their ability to speak the truth** to those who are in power. NGOs are called to partner with governments, UN agencies and the private sector to put these shared values into practice.
- (c) Role of CONGO: **CONGO as a family of NGOs** and facilitator of civil society is requested to:
 - help **empower people** to speak the truth by promoting two-way communications and sharing information equally and fairly;
 - help **empower the speakers of truth** by providing multiple and alternative fora (e.g. use of the Internet and offering different forms of meetings and training); and
 - help **strengthen the platforms from which truth can be spoken** (e.g. trade unions, religious communities, indigenous groups).

In order to achieve the above objectives, **CONGO has to become ever more inclusive by ensuring an even better regional, gender and intergenerational representation.**