



**22nd General Assembly of the Conference of NGOs
in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations (CONGO)
Geneva, December 4 to 6, 2003**

***Inclusive Global Governance:
Challenges and Opportunities for CONGO
in Partnership with the UN***

Final Statement and Advocacy Paper

Table of contents

I.	Introduction	p 3
II.	Looking back at CONGO's Journey for Inclusive Global Governance	p 5
	a. CONGO Partnerships with the UN	p 5
	b. CONGO Partnerships with Civil Society	p 7
	c. Global Outreach for Building Capacities and Networks	p 7
	Revisiting UN-Civil Society Relations	p 9
III.	Looking into Present Challenges for Inclusive Global Governance	p 10
	1. Peace and Security	p 10

2.	Human Rights	p 10
3.	Sustainable Human Development	p 13
4.	ICT for Development	p 15
	Synthesis	p 16
IV.	Final Statement: Looking forward to New Challenges for Inclusive Global Governance	p 17

“No Single Nation and Organization Can Meet Any Global Challenge Today”¹

I. Introduction

1. We, more than 200 delegates of the member organizations of the Conference of NGOs in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations (CONGO), representing a large part of the community of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) working with the UN system, met for the 22nd General Assembly of CONGO in Geneva from December 4 to 6, 2003 under the theme “Inclusive Global Governance: Challenges and Opportunities for CONGO in Partnership with the UN.”
2. The Assembly took place “At a moment of great consequence for the international community. The events of the past year have shaken the foundations of collective security and undermined confidence in the possibility of collective responses to our common problems and challenges”². These challenges are best illustrated by the ongoing crisis in Iraq, and other global and social crises.
3. The Assembly was convened on the eve of the first phase of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), which was conceived by civil society as another opportunity for global dialogue and cooperation for connecting peoples for a more inclusive global governance, overcoming the ‘digital divide’ and cultural barriers.
4. The Assembly was opened by Renate Bloem, President of CONGO, and paid tribute to some of the former presidents of CONGO and to the late Sergio Vieira de Mello, UN High-Commissioner for Human Rights, who died in Baghdad by a barbaric act of terrorism on August 19, 2003
5. The foundations of our global society are the UN charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as human rights treaties and other international conventions. Our global society rests on the principles of equality, tolerance, dignity, social and economic justice and peaceful settlement of disputes.
6. Founded in 1948, CONGO is almost as old as the UN, of which it is a longstanding partner. Civil society is indispensable in the work of the UN, especially for tackling unprecedented challenges such as the threats to global security and achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Crucial links and partnerships have to be established and civil society organizations have a vital role to play in stimulating the debate and mobilizing support for the UN. No single nation or organization can meet the global challenges without independent NGOs - they are called upon to develop and strengthen viable partnerships and ensure that participation remains effective and efficient.
7. Hence the 22nd General Assembly was a continuation of CONGO’s ongoing efforts to be more relevant and responsive to the emerging challenges as

¹ Message delivered to the CONGO GA by Mr Julian R. Hunte, President of the 57th Session of UN General Assembly

² Message to the CONGO GA of Mr Kofi Annan, UN Secretary General.

identified by the former CONGO General Assembly (held in Vienna in 2000) under the theme “UN/NGO Dynamics in the 21st Century: Together for Social Justice, Equality and Peace”.

8. Participants were also inspired by the “Spirit of Geneva” which is a living witness to global dialogue for the peaceful settlement of conflicts, as illustrated by the Geneva Initiative on the Israeli – Palestinian conflict, launched in December 2003.
9. Participants were encouraged by the words of the UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, and welcomed by Kari Tapiola, Executive Director representing the Director General of the International Labor Organization (where the Assembly was hosted) and Sergei Ordzhonikidze, Director General of the UN Office in Geneva (UNOG). Paul Hoeffel, Chief of the NGO Section of the UN Department of Public Information (DPI), brought greetings from Under-Secretary General Sashi Tharoor, and Hanifa Mezoui, Chief of the NGO Section/DESA sent warm words of encouragement.
10. Participants were challenged by two key-note speakers, Mr Julian Hunte, President of the UN General Assembly and Ambassador Walter Fust, Director of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. Ambassador Fust exhorted the Assembly with the words: “Let NGOs be NGOs, not GONGOs”. Indeed, for the achievement of democratic global governance, critical choices (with positive results/outcomes) have to be made and the future belongs to multi-stakeholders networks. NGOs may be “competing” on ideas, but not on their role and they are creating value and added-value, not costs.

II. Looking back at CONGO’s Journey for Inclusive Global Governance

11. The 22nd General Assembly of CONGO was once again a timely opportunity to review our past activities, to generate new energy for our common vision and to elaborate priorities and strategies relevant to the various emerging global challenges.
12. As CONGO is an interface between the UN and the peoples of the world, civil society at large - particularly the community of NGOs - and the UN are the two pillars upon which CONGO’s identity and mission are founded. CONGO has always played an advocacy role and it has bridged a gap by bringing the voice of the people to the UN fora and making the UN agenda closer to their reality. In more specific terms, CONGO has been mandated to “safeguard” the rights of NGOs to speak and have their voices heard at the UN and facilitate the dialogue between UN and NGOs as stipulated in Article 71 of the UN Charter.
13. CONGO’s global activities have been guided by the five strategic goals set by the previous General Assembly (Vienna, December 2000) which are: “to enhance the dialogue; to reach out to civil society; to carry out training and capacity-building activities; to improve global communication; to expand member services”.

a) CONGO Partnerships with the UN

14. Over the past three years CONGO has continued to participate in the major UN conferences: the World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance (WCAR) held in Durban in 2001; the Second World Assembly on Ageing held in Madrid in April 2002; the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) held in Johannesburg in August/September 2002; and finally the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) held in Geneva in December 2003. The first phase of WSIS - held in the city which is current home of CONGO's headquarters - was a welcomed opportunity for CONGO to facilitate the participation of NGOs, particularly from the South.

Co-operation with UN Agencies

15. CONGO's cooperation and service delivery was also expanded to the World Health Assembly and to the annual meeting of NGOs working with the World Health Organization (WHO) in Geneva. These efforts came also strongly to the forefront during the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) held in Geneva immediately following the CONGO Assembly and will continue with the 11th UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) (San Paulo, Brazil, June 2004). Support for and cooperation with the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and its functional commissions has been among the main annual activities. Worth noticing is the organization of the NGO Forum on Rural Development preceding the ECOSOC High-Level Segment (Geneva, June 2003) and the work of CONGO's substantive committees that continued their regular activities at the various ECOSOC Functional Commissions in New York, Geneva³ and Vienna

Co-operation with UN bodies and NGOs

16. CONGO has actively participated in the establishment and spreading of the NGO Informal Regional Networks (IRENE) of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA)/NGO Section. It has helped in the launching of this network in Africa (Tunis, December 2001) and in Eastern Europe (Bucharest 2003).
17. Close collaboration exists with DESA/NGO Section, DPI/NGO Section and with the Non-Governmental Liaison Service (NGLS) in Geneva.
18. The ongoing global consultation carried out by the Panel of Eminent Persons on UN/Civil Society Relations posed new challenges and opportunities for CONGO. In the midst of various activities CONGO organized consultations with NGOs and submitted proposals to the panel.

b) CONGO Partnerships with Civil Society

19. CONGO has accompanied and facilitated the emerging networks of civil society

³ Particularly worth mentioning are the activities of the Special Committee of NGOs on Human Rights and the Committee on the Status of Women, together with other substantive committees and individual CONGO member organizations, during the annual sessions of the Commission on Human Rights (CHR) and Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights in Geneva.

organizations, such as the World Civil Society Forum (Geneva, July 2002) and the International Civil Society Forum (Ulaanbataar, September 2003). CONGO's joining in the world campaign for an in-depth reform of the system of international organizations, launched by the World Forum of Networks of Civil Society, known as UBUNTU⁴, is another example of CONGO's ongoing efforts to promote partnerships among civil society organizations for common causes.

20. CONGO participation in the World Social Forum (WSF) in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in January 2002 opened new opportunities in mobilizing critical support of civil society organizations for the UN, and in critically reflecting upon the role of NGOs in realizing the ideal of "Another World is Possible" CONGO was again challenged to play a bridge role in promoting a proactive dialogue based on common principles and values between the UN and CSOs and other social movements.

c) *Global Outreach for Building Capacities and Networks*

21. With the growth and multiplication, during the last decade, of NGOs at the local, national, regional and global levels - especially in developing countries - there has been an increasingly felt need to provide a more systematic support for their capacity-building in advocacy. In this context, CONGO's outreach program has been a timely and necessary response to an increasing demand, particularly coming from NGOs that had been newly granted consultative status with ECOSOC⁵
22. This outreach program was also in accordance with the spirit of the 21st CONGO General Assembly, which resolved to "seek to increase its outreach to NGOs in developing countries whose contributions are essential to our vision of a truly inclusive global community" in order to implement the spirit of "UN/NGO Dynamics in the 21st Century: Together for Social Justice, Equality and Peace". That Assembly also "recognizes that this requires both commitment of resources and openness to partnership and to mutual responsibility."⁶
23. The successful outreach program of the Asian Civil Society Forum (ACSF)⁷, held in Bangkok in December 2002, has created new possibilities for CONGO to be more effective and responsive to the challenge of "Building Capacities and Networks for Human Rights and Sustainable Development", an essential element of "UN/NGO Partnerships for Democratic Governance" in Asia and in the world.
24. It is encouraging to note that some CONGO members were motivated to take similar initiatives in other regions, such as Africa and Latin America.

⁴ UBUNTU is an African expression for humaneness, for being in harmony with all creation

⁵ As of Dec. 2003, more than 2,600 NGOs have been granted consultative status by ECOSOC, many of them over the last five years.

⁶ Report of the 21st General Assembly of CONGO (Vienna, November 6-8, 2000)

⁷ 572 NGO representatives from 33 countries participated in one week-long meeting under the theme "UN/NGO Partnerships for Democratic Governance: Building Capacities and Networks for Human Rights and Sustainable Development." Visit www.acsf.net or www.ngocongo.org for its final statement and details.

25. The formation of a Youth Advisory Committee (YAC) was another case to create a platform to reach out to youth, whose presence has not been adequately recognized within CONGO. The YAC consists of 15 young individual persons that are supported by their organizations to provide a youth perspective to discussions by the Board and at the Committees, providing a voice for their peers within the United Nations. The YAC will provide young people with access to the UN and the opportunity to voice relevant concerns. It will also give young people and youth-led NGOs the opportunity to learn from CONGO and utilise the skills and experience that CONGO provides, contributing to CONGO volunteers and future leadership and support.

Revisiting UN-Civil Society Relations

26. The general debate on this theme was organized together with the UN Panel of Eminent Persons on UN-Civil Society Relations. The purpose of the debate was to revisit the traditional issue of UN/NGOs partnership in the context of an emerging inclusive global governance by engaging in an interactive dialogue with the panel.

Among just a few of the salient remarks were: Ambassador Erdos of Hungary (member of the Panel): "The significance of Civil Society is contested by no-one". Miguel D'Arcy de Oliviero (Advisor to President Cardoso, Chairman of the panel): "The UN's leadership is moral, intellectual and political: emerging world public opinion must link with it at this moment when arenas of power are being restricted, for example when the G7 becomes the G1!" John Clark (Director of the Panel's Secretariat): "The UN needs Civil Society for information, expertise, connections to key communities, watchdog and monitoring roles, and follow up on governmental commitments: this helps governments do a better job and encourages adherence to the Rule of Law". Ambassador Asadi from Iran (member of the Panel): "Civil Society must bring its voice and weight to the multilateral process: but without local society action, international CS action does not have adequate weight." ...It should be noted that the High-Level Panel will present its final report around March/April 2004 and expects to have recommendations addressed in part to the Secretary General and in part to the General Assembly.

CONGO's delegates expressed their concern about the growing number of GONGOs' being granted consultative status and blocking, most notably, the work of the Commission on Human Rights. They asked how the Panel intended to deal with this issue, and the answer was that the presence of GONGOs does indeed deserve attention. Delegates questioned the functioning of the ECOSOC Committee on NGOs and raised issues about its knowledge of the NGO world, about the application of resolution 1996/31 and about questions of ethics and morality. The answer was that the Panel's focus will be on processes, not on issues and events and that it will place mostly emphasis on relationships. Finally the Panel's members assured participants that they would push the UN to open up space for NGOs.

III. Looking into Present Challenges for Inclusive Global Governance

27. In order to guide CONGO's and the Committees' activities during the next Triennium, the General Assembly focussed its thematic perspective on the issue of "Inclusive Global Governance", and tackled it from four perspectives embodied in four thematic commissions. These were held on: peace and security; human rights; social development; and ICT for development. Each of them came out with a visionary statement and recommendations for concrete actions.

1. Peace and Security

The Thematic Commission of Peace and Security was convened and chaired by Ellen Mouravieff-Apostol, International Federation of Social Workers. Following the presentations given by prominent NGOs representatives and the interventions by the discussants, the Commission came up with the following recommendations:

- Set up a task force on human security with the conveners of the CONGO Committees;
- Mainstream gender concerns everywhere, especially in peace building;
- Make the Security Council resolutions known at all levels;
- Establish peace programs for school children from a very early stage;
- Change school curricula to teach the value of tolerance in schools;
- Carry out outreach programs upon which NGO credibility depends;
- Let the discussions of the various thematic commissions lead to collaborative activities among CONGO groups;
- Exhort civil society organizations to demand that their governments apply new security standards;
- Lobby governments to sign the Convention to Ban Landmines, help on mine clearance and assist victims
- Exhort NGOs to contribute to information and advocacy on the issues of peace and security.

2. Human Rights

The Thematic Commission on Human Rights was convened and chaired by Peter Prove, from the Lutheran World Federation and Chair of the CONGO Special NGO Committee on Human Rights. It concentrated upon the assessment of the 10th anniversary of the Vienna Conference on Human Rights. The key-note speech was delivered by Ambassador Saboia, Chair of that Conference's Drafting Committee, and by Bertrand Ramcharan, currently Acting High Commissioner for Human Rights. Several prominent speakers responded to the challenges posed by the keynote addresses from the various perspectives of racism and racial discrimination, religious intolerance, human rights education, human rights and terrorism and children rights. The recommendations adopted were the following:

Women and children rights

- Remind all CONGO members that violence against women and children violates the most basic human rights and that they must work for its eradication at the local, national, regional and international level;
- Encourages the CONGO members to lobby their respective governments to

remove the reservations made to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child;

- Exhorts CONGO to organize – and encourage its members to organize – panels on these reservations;
- Urge the CONGO members to take an active part in the review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (Beijing + 10) and encourage the participation of NGOs and the preparation of shadow reports based upon the questionnaires distributed by the UN Department for the Advancement of Women (DAW);
- Encourage all NGOs, not only women's rights NGOs, to seriously consider educating men and boys about changing their attitudes towards women and girls, as well as to increase the respect for women and girls and to improve the knowledge and understanding about issues affecting them all, especially HIV/AIDS and violence of all kinds.

Racism and religious freedom

- Urge all CONGO members to combat racism, religious intolerance and all forms of discrimination nationally and internationally and call upon them to take a stand against any expression of such prejudices by governmental representatives;
- Call upon all CONGO members to monitor the behavior of CONGO member organizations which in one way or another engage in racist activities or practise religious intolerance (notably in UN-related events);
- Strongly recommend that all CONGO members have a responsibility to combat all forms of religious extremism, which is increasing today in many societies and often results in violent acts;
- Invite all CONGO members to continue to work actively with the Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism and the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief.

Universality, Human Rights and Terrorism

- Call for the immediate recognition of all non-derogable rights to persons detained on suspicion of having committed acts of terror and in particular their access to a fair and independent trial;
- Strongly urge the prompt ratification and the implementation of the Statutes of the International Criminal Court (ICC) by all countries which have not yet done so;
- Reject any form of impunity from international justice;
- Strongly recommend the prompt adoption of an international mechanism to monitor counter terrorism measures at the national, regional and international levels of the UN;
- Invite the CONGO members to urge the UN to devise an institutional framework to study and operationalize the implementation of the right to self-determination as a contribution to the prevention and resolution of conflicts.

Human rights education

Recalling that the current Decade for Human Rights Education (HRE) has proven

to be a useful catalyst and umbrella mechanism which encourages governments, international organizations, national institutions, NGOs and all sectors of civil society to establish partnerships for HRE, the Thematic Cluster:

- Invites CONGO members to endorse the initiative to urge the Commission on Human Rights to recommend to the UN General Assembly at its next session to proclaim a Second Decade for HRE to begin in 2005 so as to keep HRE high on the international agenda, and that this decade should include inter alia:
 - An international Plan of Action with the indication of minimum action for each country in defined areas, accompanied by indicators for evaluation, and with the organization of regular periodic events to create momentum and continuity;
 - A system for monitoring advancements in each country;
 - Adequate resources to implement the Plan of Action, including the establishment of a Voluntary Fund for HRE
- Considers that the Second Decade would ensure continuity of current actions and be an opportunity to initiate programs based on previous experience while contributing to the implementation of the UN Declarations and Programs of Action adopted at World Conferences.

3. Sustainable Human Development

The Thematic Commission was convened and chaired by Alan Leather, from Public Services International, and the group discussion elaborated the following suggestions that can be further discussed at the NGO Committees level. This will give CONGO and its members greater recognition for their role in working with the UN system, member states and the international community to implement the development agenda based on the MDGs:

1. NGOs that embrace the right to development are encouraged to include it in their literature and in all public documents in order to give more opportunity to discuss the development agenda as a human right.
2. Women and youth are key groups to involve in the MDG implementation, as many of the areas in the goals, targets and indicators can be reached through the involvement of these groups. CONGO should do more to assure that the voices of these underrepresented groups are heard.
3. We must continue to press governments and the UN about their commitment to implement the MDGs. NGOs, governments, the private sector and the UN system need to deepen their commitments to the MDG agenda, and follow up those commitments until they are achieved. The MDGs should be more contractual and have a clear plan. NGOs should insist on precise details of implementation so that they can better monitor this progress.
4. The following issues should be further reviewed for possible action in addressing a more just world:
 - a) Create a more equitable system of trade
 - Question the role of neo-liberalism as the solution
 - Increase rapidly the access of developing countries to developed country markets

- End agricultural subsidies
 - WTO rules should be rewritten and there should not be an expansion of its role beyond core issues -- leave public services alone
- b) Ensure economic stability and protection of employees, consumers and environment by:
- Ensuring the right to trade union membership
 - Give government incentives for maintenance of labor standards and other standards
 - Ensure a proper supervision of international financial markets
 - Review the conditions attached to IMF loans
- c) Transfer wealth through a more equitable income distribution
- Increase aid
 - Create a non-discretionary global tax
 - Develop systems that enhance planned migration
- d) Provide for global governance and democratic legitimacy
- Give a greater role to the UN
 - Expand the Security Council
 - Strive for the representation of NGOs in global governance
 - All major institutions should function according to the principle “one member one vote” – not weighted voting
5. CONGO should consider convening another Millennium Forum, as we did in 2000, that should produce an NGO Declaration.
 6. The NGO study on poverty conducted by the NGO Committee on Social Development, sub-committee on Poverty, is a great example of what NGOs should be doing to enhance their work with the UN.
 7. There is a need to help in the coordination of NGO activities, and CONGO might play a larger role in doing this.
 8. CONGO leadership should promote action during the Commission on Sustainable Development re: water and sanitation. There is a need to see what the NGO role might be.
 9. CONGO might initiate capacity building for NGOs in China so that the Chinese NGOs might be able to participate/network and establish partnerships.

4. ICTs for Development

This Thematic Commission was convened and chaired by CONGO’s Past President Afaf Mahfouz and the recommendations proposed are the following:

- CONGO should become a role model of inclusive ICT use. This should include the naming of an ad hoc committee to monitor progress in this area...especially in the time period between the Geneva and the Tunis world Summit on the Information Society (WSIS).

- CONGO should maintain an interactive bulletin board that will enable us to communicate and share experiences and coordinate our efforts to urge governments to acknowledge and implement gender equality, women's rights, older persons issues and access for disabled individuals and communities. We should be a shining example of the information society we seek.
- CONGO should play a watchdog role to assure that issues of security, freedom of expression, access to information and equal opportunity are maintained and expanded.
- CONGO should insist that the UN Optical Disc System be made available to the public at large on a no-charge basis.
- The WSIS should be bold and courageous in implementing a plan of action that includes innovative and integrated communication strategies that have been pioneered by the women's movement, by older persons, by young people and by indigenous populations who have learned the value of community based problem-solving and low cost alternatives to fancy and fragile hardware that may not be appropriate.
- The WSIS should recognize that ICTs do not represent a means for the north to communicate its views to the south but rather a system of dialogue in which the south has as much to offer in the information society as any in the developed world. When it comes to information and knowledge, we are all underdeveloped and seeking ways to improve ourselves and our communities.
- Let us all recognize that ICTs are a means to a social and economic development end...we should apply ICT approaches to the MDGs and to all worthy plans of action that the UN has agreed to but for which governments have not yet found the political will to implement.

Synthesis

The recommendations above underline once more the inter-sectionality, inter-connectedness, holistic, integral and comprehensive approach of CONGO's work. The four issues of peace and security, human rights, sustainable human development and ICTs all contribute to the achievement of inclusive global governance. CONGO should assume a leading role in exhorting NGOs to strive for this ambitious goal in partnership with the United Nations.

30. After three days of extensive discussion and exchange, we commit ourselves to undertake the tasks we have set before us at this Assembly. We believe it has provided a space for building networks and capacities for upholding human rights and working for sustainable development, peace, justice and human security with a commitment to gender justice and equality.

We are convinced that the organization of this Assembly is one step to the realization of the vision of creating a “Global Civil Society Forum”, as agreed at the NGO Millennium Forum which took place at the UN headquarters in New York in May 2000.