

# **REPORT OF THE PRESIDENT TO THE 23<sup>RD</sup> GENERAL ASSEMBLY Geneva International Conference Centre 5-7 December 2007**

## **1. Introduction**

The time since our last General Assembly in December 2003 has seen the Conference of NGOs (CONGO) evolving through intense activity from the visions of my predecessors and my own and exhaustive debates of the Board on the future role of CONGO during the previous triennium to higher gear in fulfilling our mandate to enhance consultative relations with and to strengthen NGOs/Civil Society's voice at the United Nations through deepened Dialogue, Outreach, Training, enhanced Communication and Membership Drive and Service.

It was the time when the Cardoso Panel made its recommendations, when as Civil Society we interacted for a first time through a Hearing with the UN General Assembly (in preparation for the 2005 Millennium +5 Summit.) and became involved in some of the UN Reform mechanisms. It was also the time when during the process towards the World Summit on the Information Society and its complex follow up mechanisms the notion of "Multi stakeholder" action and responsibility gained more and more ground.

But above all, it was a time when CONGO was able to make significant progress in its outreach program in organizing Civil Society Fora in Asia, Latin America and Africa. In convening these Fora we were implementing CONGO's mandate to increase the participation of NGOs from all over the world and other civil society organizations whose contributions we believe are essential to a truly global community. This was one way to fulfil our mission to amplify peoples' voices from the South in the global deliberation processes by focussing particularly on the realization of the MDGs, but also on globalisation and governance issues.

We intensified dialogue with other civil society coalitions and networks, with the UN Secretariat and member states and tried to keep high profile throughout the UN System.

I was and am very pleased to have seen CONGO membership growing and to witness that following these regional meetings, initiatives to establish regional CONGO Committees are under way, implementing/realizing finally one more goal of our long held objectives to become a true global actor.

We were also able to scale up the Pre-High-level ECOSOC Fora, gaining momentum this year in the first Civil Society Development Forum: Countdown to 2015. We were deeply involved in some of the UN Reform initiatives, particularly in the strengthening of ECOSOC and the establishment of the new Human Rights Council.

Looking back on our 2003 theme: *Inclusive Global Governance: Challenges and Opportunities for CONGO in Partnership with the United Nations*, I truly believe that CONGO with and through the support of its Board, members and donors and in active cooperation with the United Nations and its Agencies took all opportunities to strengthen civil society and to enhance working together for more social justice, human rights, development and peace.

I am now happy to accompany you in the following through some of the most salient points and events which took place during the last years. More comprehensive Annual Reports as well as various reports on Civil Society Fora are available in printed form and/or on our website: [www.ngocongo.org](http://www.ngocongo.org)

## 1.1. Statutory Bodies

The 22<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly held in Geneva 4-6 December 2003 (re-)elected the President and the following organizations to serve on the Board for the next term:

### BOARD OF THE CONFERENCE OF NGOS 2003-2007

African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET)  
 Federation of Associations of Former International Civil Servants  
 Environment Liaison Centre International  
 General Board of Church and Society/United Methodist Church  
 International Association of Religious Freedom  
 International Council of Women  
 International Federation of Social Workers  
 International Federation of University Women  
 International Federation of Women's Lawyers  
 Pan Pacific and South East Asia Women's Association International  
 Pax Romana  
 Population Communication International  
 Public Services International  
 Rotary International  
 Soroptimist International  
 World Federation of United Nations Associations  
 World Jewish Congress  
 World Muslim Congress  
 World Organization of the Scout Movement  
 Zonta International

The newly elected Board met immediately after the Assembly and appointed the following Officers:

Vice-Presidents:	International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA) Pax Romana
Treasurer:	World Jewish Congress
Secretary:	Environment Liaison Centre International

The posts of First Vice-President and Vice-President Vienna were held over for further consultations in New York and Vienna. They were filled with Jackie Shapiro (1<sup>st</sup> Vice-President) and Friedrich Gehart (Vice-President Vienna) confirmed by actions of the Board 26-27 February 2004 and 26-27 August 2004 respectively. The first Vice President announced at the Board meeting in Vienna, in August 2006, her resignation and non-availability to be a candidate for President. She continued to serve until the Board meeting in March 2007 where she announced her immediate resignation. A search by the Officers to replace her did not reach a final conclusion, as a candidate, originally forthcoming, withdrew for private reasons. In the meantime, our staff person Anita Thomas has admirably upheld the presence of CONGO in New York.

## 1.2. Finding a new home

2004 began with the challenge to find new Office space in Geneva, as we had to leave the Palais des Nations shortly after our last Assembly (for "security reasons"). The search took almost 4 months – while squatting and working hard at a member's office – until we could finally install ourselves in our new premises in the former "Centre Masaryk", just in front of the UN, a XVI century charming old building that the City of Geneva is turning little by little into an NGO House.

We have just recently become neighbours of Kofi Annan when he moved in with his Foundation of the Global Humanitarian Forum just a few paces away into the Villa Rigot.

## 2. Strategic Goals: Enhance the Dialogue –Participation in UN Conferences and Major Events

### 2.1. Millennium +5

Five years after the adoption of the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the international community had decided to carry out a major assessment of their achievement and implementation worldwide. Since the year 2000 CONGO had been very active in a number of activities– among others through our Outreach Programme - in raising the awareness of NGOs about the existence of these goals and the possibilities for civil society to participate in their implementation and monitoring. The civil society fora we have organized in **Africa, Asia and Latin America** were part of this awareness raising activity that was also carried out in Geneva and New York, where we have mainstreamed the Millennium + 5 process in parallel events into all major meetings and commissions.

#### 2.1.1. CONGO's Preparation

As a result of this rich process, CONGO with the help of its Communication Coordinator, Rik Panganiban, produced a rolling report “**We Will Spare no Effort**” – A Civil Society call to Action for the five Year Review.- It was an initiative to encourage a much wider level of involvement of many civil society groups at the United Nations. The report was the culmination of more than a year of fruitful cooperation between CONGO and the NGO/DPI Executive Committee and was sponsored by the Millennium +5 Network.

Hence our particular interest in the Millennium + 5 High-level meeting of the General Assembly (September 2005) and our and many NGOs concern regarding the limited participation of civil society in the Millennium+5 Summit event as outlined in the Secretary-Generals notes on the Modalities of the Summit (GA Res.59.145 and GA Res. 59.545).

#### 2.1.2. First ever Hearing with the UN General Assembly (June 2005)

In follow-up to the concerns raised by NGOs, the Deputy-Secretary-General, Louise Fréchette, had invited some 35 NGOs from all over the world to a brainstorming session, 24 January 2005, to discuss ways and means for broader participation, taking into account security and space issues as limiting factors. The outcome was that the General Assembly organized in June, for the first time ever, hearings with civil society and the private sector as input into the official outcome document.

As CONGO President I was honoured to speak at the Official Opening after the GA President, Mr. Jean Ping and the Deputy Secretary-General, Louise Fréchette. In addition, Jackie Shapiro and Mama Koite were active participants, Cyril Ritchie a moderator and Rik Panganiban and Pera Wells were rapporteurs. The hearings were a full success since the quality statements during the two days brought together the full range of civil society concerns in relation to development (freedom from want - MDGs) peace and security (freedom from fear), human rights (freedom to live in dignity) and UN reform. The UN provided 46 pages of press releases and the Advance Unedited Summary, dated 21 July, had already considerable influence on the Draft Outcome Document (DOD, 22. July)

Even though the final output of the Summit itself was not as strong and committed as NGOs had hoped, it provided the legal basis for the adoption of some major changes in the UN structure, such as new mechanisms for strengthening ECOSOC, the creation of a Peace-Building Commission and the replacement of the Commission on Human Rights by a Human Rights Council, to the elaboration of the modalities of which NGOs - and CONGO - had given valuable inputs all year long.

In the meantime four more CS Hearings have been held successfully. CONGO has been appointed adviser to the Task Forces which each time were established to help the UNGA President to ensure the optimal participation and engagement of civil society, including NGOs and the private sector.

In particular, CONGO was very much involved in the most recent CS Hearing on the *High Level Dialogue of the General Assembly on Interreligious and Intercultural Understanding and Cooperation for Peace*. Anita Thomas kept the CONGO presence throughout the preparatory meetings, while I was coming in through tel. conferences. Together we achieved that John Taylor, CONGO member and Secretary of the Committee on Freedom of Religion and Belief was invited to the Hearing and the New York Sister Committee organized an important side event.

## 2.2. The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) and its follow up architecture

### 2.2.1. The Process

The World Summit on the Information Society, the last UN global summit to date, constituted a historic breakthrough in UN - NGO relations. Indeed, for the first time, a Civil Society Bureau was self-established by civil society constituencies involved in the Summit, as a counterpart to the Governmental Bureau for the preparation and the holding of the Summit itself. The WSIS context was in that way close to a multi-stakeholder tri-partite model and created an exchange platform between governments, civil society and the private sector.

### 2.2.2. CONGO and Civil Society self-organised structures

One of the main achievements of civil society entities during the WSIS process, and as strongly supported by CONGO, was the establishment of a civil society self-organising structure.

The **Civil Society Plenary**, fully inclusive and open to participation for all civil society entities accredited to WSIS, was the ultimate decision making space for civil society and the main organ for common civil society actions and initiatives.

More than 30 regional and thematic **Civil Society caucuses** and working groups, voluntarily established by groups of NGOs working on the same issue, dealt with the creation of substantive content, the drafting of statements and official joint submissions and the strengthening of joint lobbying strategies. A **Content and Themes Group** was in charge of coordinating and strategizing among the initiatives of these content related groupings. It notably coordinated the drafting of an independent Civil Society Declaration “Shaping Societies for Human Needs” at the end of Phase I and the Civil Society Statement “Much more could have been achieved” at the end of Phase II.

The **Civil Society Bureau** was dealing with procedural issues and organisational arrangements to facilitate civil society contributions to the whole process. It maintained close relationship and regular interactions with the intergovernmental bureau and the WSIS Executive Secretariat. The Civil Society Bureau was composed of 20 members representing various civil society families and CONGO led a process in which each of the families had to identify a focal point to serve on this new Bureau. CONGO also played a moderating function and a leading supporting role in the work of the Civil Society Bureau, servicing its meetings and implementing its initiatives, in particular during Phase II of the Summit.

CONGO also provided through **list-serves** regular information and reports on the ongoing process, while leading several consultations on procedural and organizational matters. This **bottom-up dynamics** within civil society constituencies accredited to the WSIS was one of the greatest successes of their contributions to the Summit. It brought greater visibility to civil society shared positions and joint actions during the negotiations processes, while guaranteeing **transparency, diversity and quality** in the civil society contributions to the official process. Civil society working methods were hailed by most of the Governments and NGO/CSOs as a major step forward. It also caught the attention of the media and was widely reported upon in the press.

The WSIS experience of working together beyond the diversity of civil society entities and of their sometimes opposing interests brought a new vision of CONGO’s role within civil society processes.

The modern nature of the issues addressed by the Summit and the development of ICT- based working methods at the global level contributed to offering a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing civil society at large, well beyond WSIS. The WSIS process will certainly impact on how CONGO will approach multi-lateral processes within the UN in the future and on how CONGO should and I hope will promote the construction of **common understanding and consensus building among NGOs**.

### 2.2.3. WSIS phase I and Geneva Summit, 8-12 December 2003

CONGO has played an important and central role throughout the preparatory process of the Summit: As **President of CONGO, I served on the Civil Society Bureau** since its creation during PrepCom-2, to ensure the effective inclusion of civil society in the negotiation process.

On the more technical side, Rik Panganiban, CONGO Communication's Coordinator at the time, organized the **WSIS Civil Society News Centre**, a website channelling the most current news and views from civil society organizations involved in the WSIS. The CS News Centre has fed information and analysis of the negotiations to civil society groups around the world and published their views and proposals. This met with widespread appreciation.

During the Geneva Summit, CONGO also organized in cooperation with Board members (IARF, PCI) several **parallel events** on critical issues, including the eradication of poverty, human rights, interfaith dialogue, and combating HIV/AIDS using entertainment. These events served to highlight their relation to the Information Society, bringing together key actors in civil society, UN agencies, and governments to discuss these issues.

CONGO sponsored as well a **booth at the ICT4D exhibition**, making available publications and information from CONGO and members of CONGO to the wider public. Finally, I was honoured to speak on behalf of civil society at a welcome ceremony sponsored by the Swiss government and Isolda Agazzi, Senior Programme Officer spoke at a side-event on the contribution by NGOs to the implementation of the MDGs.

### 2.2.4. WSIS Phase II process and Tunis Summit, 16-18 November 2005

CONGO continued playing a **strong facilitating role** for the 606 registered NGO entities, (more than 6000 CS participants) at the Tunis Summit. A reform of the working methods of the Civil Society Bureau in December 2004 had entrusted CONGO with the role to perform the support and servicing activities of the CSB until the holding of the Tunis Summit.

CONGO committed its staff to ensure that adequate facilities would be available for civil society during the Summit, including access to meeting rooms, office spaces, computers, internet, printers and photocopiers.

CONGO regularly met throughout the process up to the Summit with the **top-level staff of the WSIS Executive Secretariat** and maintained relationships with the **Chairperson of the Intergovernmental Bureau**, with the view to report back and consult with the wider civil society constituency. CONGO also managed room requests, the establishment of speakers' lists and the attribution of fellowships during PrepCom-2 and PrepCom-3, as well as the fair and **transparent repartition of overpasses** for the Summit Opening meetings in Tunis.

In addition to organising well attended **orientation sessions** at the beginning of each meeting of the Preparatory Committees, the CONGO staff also prepared a detailed "**Orientation Kit**" in collaboration with UN-NGLS and some financial support from **HIVOS**. A first version of this 50-page document was circulated to civil society participants during PrepCom-3 in September 2005, and a revised and up-dated version, including a French version, was made available on the occasion of the Tunis Summit.

As mandated by the Civil Society Bureau, CONGO took also the responsibility of managing sensitive issues for civil society constituencies. This included the establishment of a close **dialogue between NGOs and the WSIS Executive Secretariat on the modalities of implementation of the Summit Host Country Agreement**. There were tensions between human rights NGOs and the Tunisian Government and the issue of human rights violations, particularly the lack of freedom of expression in the host country, accompanied civil society during the entire WSIS process.

CONGO's attempts to dialogue with, as well as to challenge Tunisian high government officials, were only partly successful because a hoped-for lessening of restrictions did not occur. While the Summit itself was perfectly organized and no incidents occurred within the Summit's premises, repression outside to prevent meetings in support of Tunisian independent civil society continued. CONGO also supported and organised a great part of the media coverage of civil society participation in the Summit.

Lastly, CONGO facilitated the achievement by civil society of a broad consensus to have an independent civil society statement.

The **CONGO President gave a statement** during the First Plenary Session of the Summit. **CONGO also organized a parallel event on "Civil Society Best Practices to Bridge the Digital Divide"**, featuring high-level UN Officials and grassroots organizations as speakers.

### 2.2.5. WSIS follow-up

The Tunis outcome left quite a **complex follow-up structure**. It had created the **Internet Governance Forum**, and had asked **ECOSOC to oversee the overall follow up within the UN system**. It entrusted **relevant UN agencies and organisations to facilitate the multi-stakeholder thematic implementation** at the international level.

For this to happen, ECOSOC was asked to review and strengthen its existing **Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD)** with an additional new mandate of WSIS follow-up (this would mean a.o. enlarging the Commission), taking into account the multi-stakeholder approach.

Finally, in April 2006, the Secretary-General established the **Global Alliance for ICT and Development (GAID)**, an open multi-stakeholder mechanism for advancing the UN development agenda, including MDGs, through ICTs. CONGO was approached to become engaged.

### 2.2.6. ECOSOC and Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD)

A series of open consultations between February and May 2006, convened by the ECOSOC President, paved the way for the negotiations on the review of the CSTD by ECOSOC. **CONGO pleaded to open the CSTD process for more stakeholders**, in particular for WSIS accredited entities, even if not holding ECOSOC status (only 10% of all civil society participants in WSIS had ECOSOC status).

In parallel, **CONGO held informal talks with the Executive Director of WSIS Secretariat and, with UNCTAD providing the Secretariat to the CSTD**, to explore their support and identify future opportunities for NGO participation.

A negotiation Working Group of ECOSOC, chaired by Ambassador Janis Karklins, met in parallel to the annual ECOSOC substantial session between 11 and 27 July 2006 to negotiate a text which would establish the newly strengthened CSTD. **CONGO pushed to ensure that civil society representatives could observe and contribute to the negotiations and was at the end successful that a text was adopted which included the multi stakeholder principle**.

### 2.2.7. Global Alliance for ICT and Development (GAID)

GAID is conceived as an open multi-stakeholder Forum composed of representatives of Governments, UN agencies, civil society and the private sector, with a small secretariat in DESA, NY. Membership is open to all. GAID is governed by a Strategy Council, a small Steering Committee, to which in personal capacity the President of CONGO has been appointed, and is assisted by a High-level Advisory Group and a Champion's Network.

CONGO had initiated and facilitated a process of nomination of civil society representatives from whom the Secretary-General would ultimately select the members of the GAID's Steering Committee and the Strategy Council.

The Global Alliance is meant to represent an innovative multi-stakeholder model, working in an inclusive, dynamic and bottom-up manner, opening great challenges for the commitment of civil society actors and other stakeholders in the use of ICTs in the achievement of the MDGs. CONGO will continue in the up-coming months to play a leading role in supporting the strengthening of the Global Alliance and the achievement of its goals, as well as to mobilize the involvement of civil society actors in its activities. More details on WSIS and WSIS Follow up can be found on our website: [www.ngocongo.org](http://www.ngocongo.org)

### 2.3. Human Rights – From the Commission on Human Rights to the Human Rights Council, 2006-2007

Human rights have been another focus for CONGO. With the transition from the Commission on Human Rights to the Human Rights Council, we have been strongly involved in trying to get at least the same level of participation for NGOs, once it was decided that the Council would be a subsidiary organ of the General Assembly. **This represented a new situation for NGOs and CONGO in particular, since the consultative status we strive to safeguard is institutionally linked to ECOSOC and not to the General Assembly.**

**However, we have put all our pressure and experience in trying to keep the same rights for NGOs and we are satisfied about the outcome of our lobbying, namely that ECOSOC resolution 1996/31 and the former practices of the Commission on Human Rights will be the guiding principles for NGO participation.** Naturally, we keep following closely the institution-building process, which has extended over 2007 and is by far not finished.

#### 2.3.1. Last session of the Commission on Human Rights

On 15 March 2006, after several delays, the [GA Resolution A/60/251](#) establishing the Human Rights Council was finally adopted in New York. During the month of March CONGO organized **NGO strategy meetings** in order to discuss how to approach the final days and agenda of the last session of the Commission on Human Rights. The Commission had started its work on 13 March only to adopt a motion to suspend its work. NGOs had wanted the **Commission to end in dignity** and approve in its last session two long awaited standard setting instruments: the Convention on enforced disappearances and the Declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples.

However, governments could not find consensus on any substantive issue and decided after long struggle to end the Commission in a one day procedural session. Space was to be given to **one** NGO to speak for all, to recall the history of the Commission from an NGO perspective. CONGO called another strategy meeting on 24 March during which it was proposed and supported not to accept this top down decision of one for all NGO voice, but rather to read a short non-statement that this was unacceptable given the diversity and history of NGOs in the Commission. On 27 March 2006, the Commission thus ended its 62<sup>nd</sup> session and with it 60 years of human rights history in what NGOs called "a shameful funeral way".

### 2.3.2. The way to the new Human Rights Council

However, with this chapter closed, the attitude changed, both at the level of governments, as well as with NGOs. The focus was then to look forward towards the creation of the Human Rights Council with considerable expectations. The President of the General Assembly, Jan Eliasson, had sent his Vice-President Ambassador Arias to discuss with the Geneva community ways for a smooth transition. CONGO participated in a NGO meeting with him for more in depth discussions of NGOs prospects. Many governments held informal meetings which were open to NGOs.

At the same time the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) as Secretariat for the Council, held numerous consultations with NGOs on procedure, substance and NGO participation in the Council. As this was the time before election of members to the Council, set for 9 May at the General Assembly in NY, **many governments were actually lobbying with NGOs** to show their best face. There was almost no day in April and beginning of May without a meeting or consultation in which we were involved.

I was invited to speak at the opening session of the **ECOSOC Committee on NGOs** on 10 May 2006 in New York. I used the opportunity and had arranged an early appointment with **GA President Eliasson** on 9 May to brief him on the ongoing positive consultations in Geneva. He invited me then to attend the **election on the same day of the 47 members of the Council**. This was the largest election ever held with all 191 member states participating. They not only elected the 47 members, but also each of them, drawing lots, for 1, 2 or 3 years respectively.

### 2.3.3. CONGO's role in identifying speakers for the Opening Session of the new Council

Soon thereafter on 19 May, the Chair-designate, Ambassador Luis Alfonso De Alba from Mexico, was elected for the first year of the Council's sessions. He helped very much in creating a climate of transparency and dialogue. He systematically held consultations with all actors, including NGOs, to prepare the agenda and methods of work for the first session of the Council to be held on 19-30 June. He had invited the NGO community to provide him with three-five names/organizations to speak during the official inaugural section. **CONGO then started a difficult, but dignified process with many NGOs, including from the regions, through which we identified 5 speakers from different regions who were all known as human rights defenders**. One of them, Shirin Ebadi from Iran, could finally not make it. The others were: Mr. Arnold Tsunga (Zimbabwe), Ms. Nataša Kandić (Serbia), Ms. Sunila Abysekera (Sri Lanka) and Ms. Marta Ocampo de Vásquez (Argentina). When they spoke, they echoed the vision of many NGOs and profoundly moved participants during the first session's ceremonial part.

Afterwards the President of the Council called spontaneously for a minute of silence for all victims of human rights violations. The High Commissioner called us in the evening to thank the speakers for their contributions and CONGO for the process to identify them.

### 2.3.4. Ensuring and enhancing NGOs' participation

Prior to the first session, on 12 June 2006, CONGO invited some key ambassadors and NGOs for an informal discussion over coffee on how to address some upcoming difficult issues. This was a first attempt from our side to help enhance the spirit of dialogue among and with governments and NGOs. In addition, CONGO continued to organize **NGO strategy or orientation sessions**, before and during the sessions of the Council. CONGO also organized several meetings with Council President Ambassador De Alba and in the current year with his successor, Ambassador Costea, to discuss **ongoing and future participation of NGOs in the Council**. One of the main objectives was to convince the large NGO constituency in the human rights field **to move from quantitative to qualitative contributions and to move from consultative to real partnership status**. More detailed information on the Human Rights Council can be found on the CONGO website.

## 2.4. ECOSOC: NGO Fora and High-Level Segment

Ever since I had been challenged by the ECOSOC Support Branch Director, Sarbuland Khan, during a Roundtable Conference in Berlin (2001) to organize as CONGO a NGO/Civil Society Forum preceding and impacting the High-level Segment of ECOSOC, CONGO has systematically since 2001, in a step by step fashion, organized these Fora (2001 and 2003 in Geneva)

### 2.4.1. Forum 2004, 18 March New York

The theme in 2004 was *“Resources Mobilization and Enabling Environment for Poverty Eradication in the Context of the Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010”*. It followed very closely the previous year’s (2003) focus on “An Integrated Approach to Rural Development”. The Forum was held in New York on 18 March in the ECOSOC Chamber and jointly organized by the NGO Section/DESA, CONGO, WFUNA and the LDC Watch.

CONGO had prepared a summary of relevant recommendations from our 2003 Forum which served as the background paper for this Forum. The recommendations emanating from the discussion were then elements put together by the organizers into a document and submitted to the ECOSOC Secretariat. The document was translated into all six languages and was one of the background documents for the ECOSOC High-level Segment (28-30 June). CONGO had also prepared a statement to the HLS Segment on the process with some of the previous year’s most pertinent recommendations. This statement was read by the First Vice-President at the High-level Segment on 29 June 2004.

### 2.4.2. Forum 2005, 10 March, New York

In 2005, again in New York, (actually as part of our CONGO Board meeting and thus with all Board members participating) and in a similar manner, CONGO, together with DESA NGO Section and other partners, called upon the civil society community to join the NGO Forum for the High-level Segment of ECOSOC, entitled: *“Achieving the internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration, as well as implementing the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits; progress made, challenges and opportunities”*. The Forum adopted a range of recommendations which were translated into all languages and became a background document for the High-level Segment.

### 2.4.3. Forum 2006, 29-30 June, Geneva

#### **ECOSOC, Forum 2006 and Interactive Dialogue to the High-level Segment (HLS)**

This time we had received funds from the **Republic and Canton of Geneva**, the **Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation** as well as from the **Dutch Mission** which allowed us to support some 30 participants from least and other developing countries to come to the Forum under the theme: *“Creating an environment at the national and international levels conducive to generating full and productive employment and decent work for all, and its impact on sustainable development”*.

From the more than 400 registered participants, the Forum gathered finally 306 participants, representing 80 civil society organizations from more than 50 countries, who participated in the six following clusters:

1. Globalization and its impact on decent work, both in developing and developed countries (with a special focus on labour migration);
2. Creating an enabling environment at the national level conducive for growth and employment creation (with a special focus on the informal sector);
3. Employment for women, youth and the elderly;
4. Human rights and employment for vulnerable groups: indigenous peoples, people with disabilities and people living in post-crisis situations;

5. Employment in the rural and urban areas;
6. New forms of employment (including e-employment)

The strategic way the Forum was organized allowed all participants' ownership in the final set of recommendations. The detailed report of the Forum is available on our website at [http://www.ngocongo.org/files/forum\\_report\\_final.pdf](http://www.ngocongo.org/files/forum_report_final.pdf) and in printed form.

#### **2.4.3.1. Interactive Dialogue and High-level Segment (HLS) 5 July 2006**

During CONGO Board discussions with the President of ECOSOC concerning the outcome of our proposed Forum and how to interact on this basis with members of the High-level Segment, I had asked for a specific slot in the program of the HLS itself. But during the process of ECOSOC's own preparations for the HLS, this request seemed to be difficult to realize, given the very high-level participation and the crowded agenda of the three days. We finally found a solution in **a lunch-time side-event**. This meant enormous new organizational work, getting sponsors and prepare for a luncheon which would **attract the high-level calibre we were targeting**. Finally, we succeeded to have a sit down lunch for 76 participants, half the Ministers and Ambassadors we wanted and half civil society from our Forum. It was a very lively dialogue and a great success. Nevertheless, I made a statement at the **High-level Segment**, asking for next year's institutionalization of the interaction with civil society.

#### **2.4.3.2. ECOSOC substantive session 3-28 July 2006**

During the ECOSOC substantive session CONGO followed closely **resolutions on the CSTD** and on the **report of the Committee on NGOs**. CONGO also followed the discussion on **ECOSOC reform**, in particular on giving ECOSOC the mandate for the **Annual Ministerial Review (AMR)** of the MDGs and other outcomes of UN conferences, as well as for the **Biennial Forum for Development Cooperation (FDC)**, which should give ECOSOC more coherence in the development agenda. There was quite a strong resolution urging the GA to adopt soon its resolution on strengthening ECOSOC, deriving from the Outcome of the 2005 Summit. During the closing session, the Chair and also Under-Secretary General Ocampo stressed the importance of this year's theme of the HLS on Employment and Decent Work. He expressed satisfaction that it was now fully on the UN agenda and within the Ministerial Declaration. He also lauded the active participation of NGO/CSOs throughout the session.

#### **2.4.4. Forum 2007 "A Platform for Development: Countdown to 2015", 28-30 June, Geneva ECOSOC Forum 2007, Interactive Dialogue Luncheon, HLS, Substantive Session**

This year's ECOSOC High-level Segment launched the **Annual Ministerial Review (AMR)** and the **Development Cooperation Forum (DCF)**. The theme of the General Debate was "**Pro poor Growth**" and the subject of the first AMR was "**Poverty Eradication**". CONGO had held comprehensive discussions with partners and donors in which way to have impact on these new mechanisms and finally decided to launch together with the Millennium Campaigns and other partners a "**Platform for Development: Countdown to 2015**".

As the freshly printed report on this most recent Development Forum will be available at the General Assembly, I will add here only: the Civil Society Development Forum was a great success. Through partnering with major global civil society organisations, CONGO succeeded to organize an unprecedented inclusive Forum. .... "We, nearly **600 participants** of the Civil Society Development Forum 2007, representing some **300 non-governmental organizations** (NGOs)/civil society organizations (CSOs) from **75 countries of all regions of the world**, including more than **150 participants from Africa, Asia and Latin America**, gathered in Geneva, Switzerland, from 28 to 30 June 2007 to debate on the Forum's overall theme *A Platform for Development: Countdown to 2015*. We met at a time when we reached the mid-point for achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2000.

The Forum had been convened by the Conference of NGOs in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations (**CONGO**), in close cooperation with the **UN Millennium Campaign** and other networks such as **ActionAid International**, **Civicus** and the **Global Call to Action against Poverty**. The Forum was supported by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, and the Republic and Canton of Geneva, whose contributions greatly helped to make it happen....” So begins the Final Statement which you will find in the report.

The Forum has reached its objectives:

- To impact and bring **new dynamics into ECOSOC** (Ministerial Declaration and Closing Statement of the USG on the whole ECOSOC session,)
- To discuss **future** on the MDGs (Final Statement)
- To lay the ground for a **continued Civil Society Development Platform** on: Countdown to 2015!

Addressing the Forum on its final day, **Sha Zukang, the new Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs (DESA)**, said: “Your voice is heard loud and clear. It will sharpen our focus when we discuss cutting edge issues of climate change, desertification and health, with particular emphasis on HIV and AIDS in the following days. The Forum has proved beyond doubt that this growing interdependence can work well.”

#### **2.4.4.1. Interactive Luncheon on the Outcome of the Forum, 2 July 2007**

Once again, the **Interactive Dialogue Luncheon**, organized by CONGO with the support of the Governments of **Finland** and **Mexico** on the first day of the ECOSOC HLS, aimed at bringing the findings of the Forum in a lively discussion to high-level participants of the ECOSOC HLS. We succeeded to have a sit down luncheon with 35 members from the HLS and 35 participants from the Forum. The discussion was co-moderated by Swiss Ambassador Walter Fust, ILO Executive Director for Employment, Jose Manuel Salazar and the CONGO President and helped to **bring the Forum immediately to the attention of high-level ECOSOC participants**.

#### **2.4.4.2. High-level Segment 2-6 July 2007**

CONGO gave an official presentation of the Forum at the General Debate of the HLS on 4 July. The CONGO President had invited 5 more participants to bring each a different topic and perspective. She introduced the statement and gave then the floor to **Martin Khor, Third World Network (Malaysia)**, **Salma Abbasia, World e-Group (Pakistan)**, **Colm Ó Cuanacháin, Action Aid, (Ireland)**, **Fatima Ahmed, Zenab for Women in Development (Sudan)** and **Arturo Romboli, World Scout Movement, (Argentina)**. This kind of presentation was very well received and added to the new dynamics civil society could bring to ECOSOC. Other participants from the Forum made statements during the launching of the **Development Cooperation Forum (DCF)** and the launching of the **Annual Ministerial Review (AMR)**, a voluntary governmental peer review on MDG achievements. After the closing of the **Global Compact** which was held parallel to the **ECOSOC DCF**, I was privileged to hand over to the **attending Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon**, a letter which had gained momentum and signatures during our Forum. In this letter CONGO had asked the **SG to establish a Civil Society Advisory Group**.

#### **2.4.4.3. ECOSOC Substantive Session, 2-27 July, 2007**

During the remaining ECOSOC session the CONGO President interacted during discussions with the Regional Commissions, in particular with Abdouleh Jannie from the ECA, but also during further Panel discussions on the MDGs.

In closing this year’s substantive session of ECOSOC, the Under-Secretary-General Sha Zukang made the following remarks: “.....The Council has had a successful session, and this would not have been possible without the active support of civil society. **I would like to thank the Swiss Government and CONGO for helping organize the Civil Society Development Forum prior to the high-level segment of ECOSOC, which was attended by more than 500 participants. Civil Society brings great energy to ECOSOC. Please continue this involvement.**”

## 2.5. DPI Conferences 2004-2007

As many DPI NGOs also hold ECOSOC status and often are CONGO members, CONGO has been involved in these Conferences through its members and Committees for a very long time. As President I was honoured to be invited to speak at the Opening Ceremony for the last 4 years (once, when in hospital, replaced brilliantly by our Secretary, Cyril Ritchie). After the 2005 cooperation of CONGO with the DPI NGO Executive Committee in the Millennium+5 process, CONGO has been invited to sit on their preparatory/planning Committee for every annual Conference.

Following this year's (2007) Conference on "Climate Change: How it impacts us all!" at which for the first time a common Declaration for Action was adopted, CONGO has also been invited to establish a framework through which NGOs worldwide could be invited to bring forward or share their **proposals for solutions** to reverse - or at least stop - the tendency towards global warming. I was invited to serve on a managerial Committee. In addition, preparing for DPI's next year Conference on Human Rights, to be held for the first time outside of New York in Paris, CONGO and CONGO Committee on Human Rights have been and will be consulted for input.

## 3. UN/NGO Relations

### 3.1. Cardoso Report and Follow-up

The Report of the Panel of Eminent Persons on United Nations - Civil Society Relations was released on 11 June 2004 (A/58/817) and officially launched in New York and Geneva (via satellite) on 21 June 2004. NGO/CS/UN relations are at the core of CONGO's mission and we were therefore involved at various levels in consultations held by Panel members throughout the year (e.g. at Board meetings in 2003, NGLS consultation, WG Asia Bangkok meeting, CONGO General Assembly and February Board meeting 2004).

We also wrote letters to Louise Frechette and President Cardoso, met with his personal Assistant, Miguel Darcy de Oliveira and had submitted a number of recommendations and comments ([www.ngocongo.org](http://www.ngocongo.org)). As for the follow-up process, it fell under the purview of Louise Frechette and was in the hand of Marta Mauras (who both have left since).

Following the launch, CONGO organized, together with NGLS, a series of events in New York (3 and 10 August 2004) and Geneva (26 July 2004) to help NGOs better understand the context of - but also react to - the 30 recommendations. Another seminar was conducted by the CONGO WG on Asia on 13 August in Bangkok. The **CONGO Board meeting that took place in August 2004 sent a collective response to Kofi Annan/Louise Frechette** as input into the Secretary General's Report to the General Assembly. The SG's Report was finalized in the first week of September.

In spite of the SG's support for the report and many of its recommendations, there has yet not been until today (November 2007) a General Assembly resolution to officially endorse the Cardoso and the SG's report thereon. A somewhat weak Brazilian Draft had circulated, but had not generated enough support for having been officially tabled. It was partly due to civil societies' own divided reaction to the recommendations but more to governments' resentment that no official course has been taken. In the meantime the whole civil society question as pertained in the Cardoso report has moved to the back burner.

However, without much ado some of its recommendations have been implemented nevertheless. The Civil Society Hearings with the General Assembly, the creation of a Civil Society Advisor Unit (filled with the excellent Shamina De Gonzaga) with the Office of the President of the General Assembly, the multi-stakeholder principle do all have a trace of the Cardoso report.

CONGO, in addition, has requested the SG to establish a civil society advisory group, a request without official response yet.

### 3.2. United Nations Secretariat

The CONGO Board has mandated me to explore alternative possibilities for CONGO's accreditation other than the ECOSOC general consultative status (such as a resolution by the GA, or other). In this respect I was received by the **Presidents of the UN General Assembly, Ambassadors Julian Hunte in 2004, Jean Ping in 2005 and, together with the CONGO Officers, by Ian Eliasson in 2006** to follow up on this process (and it is ongoing, not yet a priority for member states) We need enough support from different member states to pass a resolution.

I also met with **Under-Secretary General, Mr. Jose Antonio Ocampo, with USG Mr. Sha Zukang** and other UN Officials to nurture relations and discuss the Regional Fora, the NGO Fora to the ECOCOC High level Segment, the follow-up process to the WSIS, as well as UN/CS relations.

The CONGO Board has special relations with the **ECOSOC Support Branch, its former Director, Sarbuland Khan and the current one, Nikhil Seth as well as with the Presidents of ECOSOC Ambassadors Ali Hachani and Dalius Cekuolis**. Great support we always had, of course, from the Chief, NGO Section DESA, **Hanifa Mezoui**, friend and partner, and from the DPI Chief, **Paul Höffel** and his successor **Juan Carlos Brandt**. In addition, we were often inspired by former DPI USG **Shashi Tharoor**. They all came to interact with the CONGO Board.

The utmost highlight was the visit to the Board in March 2006 of **SG Kofi Annan**, and the day thereafter, of **GA President Ian Eliasson**. It was the time when the draft resolution establishing the Human Rights Council was discussed in the GA, and they both shared their views and anticipation and asked for our support. Such visits are truly momentous events for NGOs.

The relations to the Geneva UN Secretariat were somewhat strained following our being forced to vacate our premises at the Palais des Nations. But this changed when we moved into our new home and since relations with the NGO Liaison Officer, **Ricardo Espinosa**, and the whole Geneva system have constantly improved, culminating when the **Director-General, Mr. Ordzhonikidze**, received me together with some key NGOs before our Development Forum (2007) for a very positive and comprehensive exchange of views.

Profiting from the WSIS process, we established excellent relations with the **SG of the ITU, Mr. Uzumi**, and today with his successor **Dr. Touré**, with the Executive Secretariat, in particular **Charles Geiger**, who is today in the UNCTAD Secretariat. **SG of UNCTAD, Dr. Supachai Panitchpakdi** and the **DG of the ILO, Juan Somavia**, are equally good friends of CONGO. New relations need still to be established with **Margaret Chan, DG of WHO**.

### 3.3. Access

While chicaneries (visitor entrance, controls and search etc) vis-à-vis NGOs in New York have been widely discussed and finally more or less tolerated, access problems in Geneva did not really seem to exist, until the day when the Place des Nations was inaugurated with its new multi-little-fountain square, 29 March 2007. There was some irony in hearing the speech from the President of Switzerland, Mme **Micheline Calmy-Rey** praising this new place being a bridge of the Geneva people to the UN, when the NGO Community was told three hours later that there was no longer access for **them** (all others, Press including could still use it) to the UN from the Place des Nations. NGOs had to enter the UN via a far away visitors' gate (with no public transport or parking nearby) which would considerably hamper the flexibility of access for many NGOs having their Offices around Place des Nations. The reason given was that at the Place des Nations entrance no security equipment was available

As CONGO President, I immediately wrote a letter to the DG, Security Officers and the Swiss Ambassador, complaining about the **second class treatment of NGOs**. The Press got the story and had next day a full page article. It took a couple of weeks and some more letter writing, but CONGO achieved that NGOs with yearly UN badges could finally enter the UN again via Place des Nations.

### 3.4. ECOSOC Committee on NGOs

CONGO has a standing invitation to participate in the Committee's sessions. In 2006, I was specifically invited to address the Committee at its May session on CONGO activities. Upon request of some of our member organizations I mentioned also the summary rejection of the Danish, German and ILGA Gay and Lesbian organizations and raised the principle of non-discrimination as well as undue process. The same issues were contained in the report of the Committee to ECOSOC and provoked there very heated discussions among member States, with final decision to defer the adoption of the report to the resumed session of ECOSOC.

Although my comments in 2006 had not been well received with the Committee, I must say in all fairness, that the Committee in **reviewing in January 2007 CONGO's first quadrennial report, made very laudable comments on CONGO's sterling contributions to the work of the United Nations**. I personally received a very commendable letter from the Secretariat and such a note was also found in the official report of the Committee to the ECOSOC July 2007 session.

At that session the Committee's report was once more hotly debated by member States, in particular the issue of the two outstanding decisions on the Gay and Lesbian organisations from Canada and Germany. A roll call vote brought finally consultative status to these organisations after two year consecutive deferrals.

## 4. Outreach

### 4.1. Latin American and Caribbean Seminar (LAC), 1-4 June 2004, UN ECLAC, Santiago de Chile

All our outreach programs went through long preparatory processes, both during CONGO Board discussions as well as with our partners in the region. After the success of the Forum held at the UN Economic and Social Commission of Asia Pacific (ESCAP) in Bangkok in 2002, we were pleased when we had finally also green light for the holding of a meeting in Latin America. The Latin America and Caribbean Seminar: "Partnerships for a New Era: Achieving the Millennium Development Goals" took place in Santiago de Chile on 1- 4 June 2004. It was attended by some 130 participants, representing 120 local, national and regional NGOs from 13 countries. It was organized with the help of Jessica Hermosilla, as regional Coordinator, with a small volunteer staff, under the overall guidance of Leslie Wright, past First Vice-President.

A small grant was received from UNDP and UNFPA. It was held under the auspices of the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) who graciously provided us with free venue, interpretation, catering and excellent substantive input from top Officials.

The Seminar produced a very concrete Plan of Action (PoA) that was seen as a strong commitment to lobby the governments of the region, in cooperation with the UN agencies, to increase their efforts to reach the MDGs. The PoA is structured alongside the seven first MDGs, whereas the eighth one - achieving a global partnership for development – is not specifically targeted.

The burden of achieving this Goal is considered to fall primarily on developed countries. However, the preamble states the need to "exert pressure on the governments of developed countries to achieve the 8<sup>th</sup> MDG defining specific indicators for its implementation". The full report can be found on our website.

I recall the enthusiastic joy of participants coming together and getting so deeply involved working towards the outcome document. And I regretted that we could not offer immediately a coherent follow up process. I am all the more pleased that now finally through our ECOSOC Fora and other events in New York and Geneva contacts were renewed, and the emergence of CONGO Latin American presence is also forthcoming.

## 4.2. Asian Civil Society Forum 2004: “Building UN/NGO Partnerships through the MDGs” 21-25 November 2004, UN ESCAP, Bangkok, Thailand

This second ACSF was meant as a follow-up to the first one and it aimed to “amplify Asian peoples’ voices in the global deliberation processes”, by focussing particularly on the MDGs and the upcoming Millennium + 5 Summit. This main topic was looked at through the four pillars: **democracy and human rights; peace and human security; environment and sustainable development; trade and finance**. Working in close cooperation with Forum Asia, under the **leadership of Anselmo Lee**, this second Forum in a way institutionalized civil society from Asia, in particular in the human rights area.

We received again support from ESCAP for venue and catering and also from UNEP who sponsored most of our participants, as these attended afterwards UNEP’s meeting which was held back to back with our Forum.

In the Final Declaration, Forum participants reiterated calls for a rights-based approach to the MDGs and expressed concerns about the excluded and the discriminated segments of the Asian society. They emphasized the **interdependence between democracy, human rights and the rule of law**, acknowledging that there is **no single model of democracy or democratic institutions**.

Concerns were expressed about several issues, such as the fact that many Asian countries have entered into **Bilateral Immunity Agreements with the USA in relation to the statute of the International Criminal Court** and the fact that the right to self-determination is not sufficiently implemented in the region, leading to many conflicts.

As CSOs working with communities of peoples negatively affected by the impact of globalization, they observed with concern how the **three pillars of globalization - identified as being trade and financial liberalization, privatization and deregulation - are being pushed forward through the WTO, the WB and the IMF, hindering the achievement of the 8<sup>th</sup> MDG**.

They called for any negotiation on trade to be compatible with existing international norms and standards on human rights, environment, peace and human security. Other major areas of concern included information society and civil society; the Beijing Platform for Action, and women human rights defenders.

In response to the Report of the Cardoso Panel on UN – Civil Society Relations, ACSF produced a specific declaration on this topic, regretting that it had not included their recommendations to “enhance CS participation in the work of the UN with particular regard to the national level”.

The Forum also produced **a specific Declaration on the MDGs, reaffirming that they should be in line with the principles contained in the Declaration on the Right to Development and calling for a more engaged commitment from industrialized countries on MDG 8**.

## 4.3. African Civil Society Forum (AfCSF, 21-24 March 2007, UNECA, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia)

After the long-held concept of AfCSF, developed together with FEMNET and discussed during numerous Board meetings and after the many preparatory events, we finally gathered for the event in **Addis Ababa on 20 March 2007**. CONGO was represented through its President, Communications- and Assistant Program Officers, Adina and Anne-Laure, and later joined by the Human Rights and WSIS Officer, Philippe Dam. We were all so very pleased to hold this Forum, in a way also as **a follow up to the first Forum organized under my predecessor Afaf Mahfouz, in Kampala, Uganda**.

More than 250 participants representing over 150 NGOs/CSOs from 32 countries of the 5 African Regions had responded to our call to work on the theme **“Democratizing Governance at Regional and Global Level to Achieve the MDGs”**. The Forum was conceptualized as a multi-dimensional and multi-sectoral event and was organized to develop a practical framework for African civil society to formulate and advance their advocacy strategies at national, regional and global levels.

Taking advantage of the very existence of the Forum with so many civil society participants present, CONGO had also suggested organizing a side event, namely: the launching of the **African Chapter of the Global Alliance for ICT and Development (GAID)**. **DESA New York, the ECA and the Francophonie** gave financial support to this initiative.

The Final Statement of the Forum is contained in the full report available at the General Assembly, also on our website. Therefore I will make here only a few additional comments:

CONGO is appreciative of having been privileged to work with so many respected African Civil Society leaders, and for having been able to create a space where people could speak their minds. We are also grateful for the enthusiastic engagements of all participants and for having come at a moment to Africa when the ECA, and also the African Union, **appeared to be looking for a framework for civil society engagement**. We thank them for their tremendous support and for their suggestion to **institutionalize the AfCSF**. Working together with Mama Koite, and her colleagues from FEMNET, has cemented not only this great cooperation, but also a lasting friendship.

I also felt deeply honoured for having received together with H.E Alpha Oumar Konaré, Commission Chairperson for the African Union, and Mama Koite Doumbia, President of FEMNET, the Award of the **“Chevalier du Mérite Africain”**. This Trophy was awarded by an NGO from Benin **“Ensemble Allons dans la Paix”** for special efforts to relieve Africa out of poverty and continued support for the development of the African Continent.

#### **4.4. CONGO’s relation to Kyung Hee University (KHU) (South Korea)**

Ever since CONGO joined with Kyung Hee University/Global Cooperation Society and the NGO/DPI Executive Committee as one of three conveners for the 1999 Seoul International Conference: **“The role of NGOs in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Inspire, Empower, Act!”** Kyung Hee University has nurtured relations with CONGO and the DPI ExCom on an ongoing basis.

Follow up initiatives by KHU resulted in first ever post graduate courses on CSO/NGOs, NGO working clinics, cyberspace operation centres and yearly Peace Conferences to which CONGO was often invited as resource to provide its experience with NGOs. In exchange CONGO included in its Internship program three students from Kyung Hee University.

Most recently CONGO and CIVICUS were invited to a preparatory Conference to help build the CS/NGO basis for a **multi-stakeholder event, the World Civic Forum, to be held in 2009**.

At the same time the Global Cooperation Society (GCS, a CONGO member) with its Australian Chapter is about to prepare for the official **2009 (+10) follow up Conference** in Sydney, Australia. CONGO and DPI have again been asked to be co-conveners. The CONGO Board (August 2007) accepted this in principle, as long as there were no financial charges for CONGO.

## **5. Training**

Training for capacity building, networking and UN mechanisms has been part of each outreach project. The Civil Society (ECOSOC) Fora 2006 and 2007 also provided manifold training opportunities, particularly for newcomers, who could learn through their active participation on the spot how to interact effectively with UN mechanisms.

Orientation and training sessions have been organized throughout the WSIS process and were organized, together with our respective Committees during the Commission on Human Rights (CHR) and the current sessions of the Human Rights Council. The New York Committees on the Status of Women and on Social Development have regularly organized consultations and other orientation sessions for the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) and the Commission on Social Development.

In addition, CONGO, mainly through senior staff persons, has given numerous lectures to University Students, Interns from other organizations or even young Diplomats on

- CONGO and UN – civil society relations
- UN Human Rights Mechanisms and NGOs

Some independent observers have asked CONGO to provide more intensive training for NGOs, particularly for small NGOs and newcomers, to learn how to make more productive contributions, follow more closely the debate, be less repetitive, in one word to learn how to have a real impact. This is a very sensitive (political) issue, as many NGOs have raised or received funds to come to meetings and to deliver such and such statement. It is also a capacity issue for CONGO, as such training would be very labour intensive. However, following the Cardoso Report, I believe CONGO should move to establish a **CONGO Academy for Training NGOs** to be more effective.

## 6. Communication

During my mandate as President, CONGO continued to be an initiator, a facilitator and a convener of events related to major UN meetings. The numerous fora we have organized have broadened the public involvement in the global agenda and provided opportunities for NGOs to present their views, to share their experiences and knowledge.

Since the departure in March 2006 of Rik Panaganiban who joined other civil society horizons back in New York, Adina Fulga Radi took over as Communications Coordinator in Geneva. The Communication & Membership drive – derived from our Strategic Plan on Dialogue, Training and Outreach, knew a new thrust, as CONGO continued to assist NGOs in voicing their concerns more effectively at the UN.

Throughout 2005-2007, the CONGO Secretariat in Geneva, together with the offices in New York (on a continued basis) and Vienna (on a less regular one) developed and implemented a communications strategy aimed at benefiting the CONGO Membership and the larger civil society. This strategy is based on the following **actions**:

**Enhance external communications** with key collaborators and the media (Tunis 2005, Geneva 2006/7, Addis Ababa 2007);

**Provide strategic counsel** to NGOs and dispatch information pertaining to NGO rights (e.g. NGO access to the Palais des Nations through Nations Gate);

**Produce, edit and distribute communications materials**, including written and visual materials;

A completely revamped **CONGO website** “<http://www.ngocongo.org>”– launched in 2006 – and, featuring a user friendly gateway to NGOs worldwide, provides:

- **Daily information and regular updates** on the Human Rights Council, the World Summit on Information Society, the African Civil Society Forum and/or the latest Development Forum – to mention just a few – to keep our members and friends abreast of the latest events within the UN System
- A dedicated section for **CONGO members** and the online membership directory allowing our members to access important resource linkages, offering them the opportunity to forge new partnerships
- Whether in New York, Geneva or Vienna, the **CONGO Committees** are making good use of the website by promoting their activities and showcasing their programmes

The **CONGO e-update** is a weekly online bulletin informing our members and affiliated networks of relevant upcoming events sponsored by the United Nations, CONGO, or its Committees, as well

as other major civil- society-related initiatives. It thereby responds to an increasing demand, from full and associate members equally, as well as from other grass root organizations. The **CONGO Newsletter** focuses on membership and membership issues and publishes analyses on issues of global concern. **Issue Fora reports:** CONGO processes all its production (writing, editing, design, layout) in-house. **Regular reporting** through listservs gives members full insights into main UN Conferences and events.

**Our Communication strategies helped to improve the overall image and reputation of CONGO.**

## 7. Membership

**Membership Services** represent an important part of our common strategy/activities and are closely related to communication. CONGO is working to create a ‘members only’ section on our website that would not only provide access to data but would also offer project sharing and other services our members want (CONGO-holder values).

The constant update of membership data, payments and member interests is extremely work-intensive. It has been and is carried out zealously both by Anita Thomas in New York and in Geneva by Florence Hausermann, replaced since February 2007 by Anne-Laure Solnon. For the future I would recommend to handle membership updates and payments in one centre and include for easier and more rapid payments e-Banking facilities, as requested already by some of our members.

We have increased our membership considerably. When I took over as President we had according to the General Assembly Report 325 members. Anne-Laure’s most recent update (after taking out and deleting members who have not shown any sign of interest since 2002 nor responded to many mailings) shows the following:

We have 524 members (443 full and 81 associate ones) based in **74** countries (Afghanistan, Angola, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Bangladesh, Belgium, Benin, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Brazil, Cameroon, Canada, China, Colombia, Côte d’Ivoire, Cuba, Czech Republic, Denmark, Egypt, Ethiopia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Haiti, Hong-Kong, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Iran, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Kenya, Korea, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Macedonia, Malaysia, Mali, Nepal, New Zealand, Nigeria, Pakistan, Panama, Philippines, Portugal, RD Congo, Russian Federation, Samoa, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Serbia and Montenegro, Singapore, South Africa, Spain, Sudan, Suriname, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, Thailand, The Netherlands, Tunisia, Turkey, UK, Uruguay, USA, Venezuela).

### 7.1. Work of Committees

CONGO has always maintained that the backbone of our collective work on substance at the United Nations is the responsibility of NGO Committees, established under the auspices of CONGO. Currently we have 10 Committees including Sub-Committees in Geneva, 22 in New York and 5 in Vienna. Committees are requested to submit their individual reports, and the CONGO Secretary, Cyril Ritchie, will provide a background paper for discussion at the Assembly.

Therefore, my comments here relate only to the most recent Board discussion on the relations of the Committees to CONGO as parent body, following some requests from one of the Committees for advice. As our Rules only provide guidance for the establishment of Committees, after which they are autonomous, we had no rules to follow other than to apply common sense in this particular case.

For the future it may be advisable to create a task Force or WG for the establishment of some more helpful guidelines.

## 8. Funding, Staffing and Administration

Following our first ECOSOC Forum in 2001 in support of Africa, to which we could just bring 3 African women (funded with left over funds from the “Strengthening African Women’s Voices” project of the Durban Conference) but having had invited all African NGOs based in Geneva, we were approached by the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation (SDC). Our objectives for the ECOSOC Fora as well as our mandate to strengthen the voice of overall civil society in the UN debate were much in line with some of their own objectives. SDC therefore had an interest to strengthen the CONGO Geneva Office which at the time consisted only of the President and a 50% administrator.

SDC provided a first two and a half year contract (2001-2003) allowing for the engagement of a Program and Communication Officer, President’s expenses and some core activities. Very satisfied with our delivery, SDC renewed and upgraded a second contract 2004- 2006 which included contracts for specific projects,(i.e. ECOSOC Fora) and core activities, some remuneration for guaranteeing President’s full time involvement at all levels, provided we would find matching funds to the submitted budgets. Renewing their support for 2007, it included this time a larger amount for a scaled up Development Forum, as well as for regional activities, project remuneration and continued core. The Development Forum budget included provisions for the engagement of a Forum Coordinator as an Executive Officer.

In addition we received generous contributions for respective regional activities from the Economic Commissions for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) the Economic and Social Commission for Asia/Pacific (ESCAP), the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the AU and the Francophonie, as well as from UNDP, UNEP and UNFPA. Additional Funds came from the Republic and Canton of Geneva and the Dutch Mission, as well as from the UN FOUNDATION for the New York Office.

In recognizing CONGO’s lead role in the WSIS process, we also received funds from Canada through the ITU for the WSIS second phase towards Tunis, which helped us to provide the secretariat services to Civil Society. The WSIS arrangement, including for WSIS follow-up provides also funding from ICT4D from Switzerland, which allowed us to go through the last two years with some tranquillity and to maintain the position of the WSIS/ Human Rights Coordinator. While the President’s position is not a salaried one, she/I did receive a management fee, in recognition of my personal project management responsibilities, as mentioned in my reports to the CONGO Board. When during the current year, these projects related remunerations for the President were increased, I used it also to help the New York Office to remain operational.

Our accountant, Myrna Liengme, receives a small monthly consultancy fee which in general is paid by our Treasurer, the World Jewish Congress, to whom we continue to be most grateful.

To all our donors I would like to give our most heartfelt and grateful appreciation, particular for their understanding of the role of CONGO and never imposing any condition that would have compromised our complete independence and integrity. On the contrary: they always gave us to understand that their support to us was on a mutually reinforcing basis for enhanced partnerships to strengthen civil society as the best guarantor for a healthy society/democracy.

I cannot miss today’s opportunity to give full praise to our small but dedicated staff:

I want to particularly mention **Anita Thomas**, who kept CONGO New York going....

**Rik Panganiban** (communications until 2006), **Florence Hausermann** (admin and membership until 2006), **Alejandra Mendoza** (WSIS/Youth /Spanish until 2006), **Isolda Agazzi** (senior program), **Adina Fulga Radi** (communications – and how often have you not all heard from her), **Philippe Dam** (wsis and human rights), **Anne-Laure Solnon** (admin, membership and assistant program) and since 2007 **Werner Schleiffer** (development forum and office coordinator)

They work often long hours (although not all on full-time basis) and on many other issues and they all made CONGO shine. **They are CONGO’s assets**, and I do sincerely hope, they will stay with us!

Additional enthusiasm came often during these last years from our **Interns** from various Universities, and I want to mention their names: Anna Sleszynska (Poland), Sebastian Zielinski (Poland), Florian Evenby (Norway), Jens Kremer (Germany), Jette Madsen (Denmark), Zhenab Choug (Algeria), Bunmi Ogunlade (Nigeria), Claudia Engelmann (Germany), Natalia Martinez (USA/Cuba/Russia), Laura Staubli (Switzerland), Lindsay Lee, Eunjin Jeon and Seiyong Yoo from Kyung Hee University, (South Korea), Luna Iacopini (Italy), Erinn Wattie (Canada), Tracy Baumgardt and Abubakar Kanu (USA). We all continue to enjoy our office, which allows space for not only our staff but also for interns and small meetings.

Looking to the future I would like to quote here my predecessor Afaf Mahfouz, - and I could not agree with her more - , who said at the 2000 General Assembly: “In the future, it will be important for Geneva to demonstrate that it can raise funds for support of the office there, as it did in the past under Bob Harris.... Vienna, too, will need to demonstrate that it can obtain support for some of its work.

**Once all of us are working, pulling some weight in all three locations, we will be in a strong position to serve NGOs in each location and face the challenges that lie ahead for CONGO”. I would add “and at Regional Levels”** as already envisaged by Bob Harris 10 years ago who said: “The limit of voluntary input has probably been reached. Basic staffing - not a bureaucracy- is now necessary if the **collective NGO work at the UN is to involve the regions of the South in a genuine way.”**

I would like here to give special recognition to the Vienna **Office and its Vice- President, Friedrich Gehart**, who succeeded to organize during these last years two Civil Society Fora, the first ever held in Vienna under the CONGO auspices, “**Regional crime prevention Forum for NGOs from Central and Eastern Europe**”, Vienna (27-28 October 2005) and “**Civil Society and Outer Space**” Vienna (8-9 October 2007).

## 9. The Way Forward

CONGO has made substantive progress - and I personally feel great satisfaction - in coming closer to realizing our vision by reaching many of its objectives of the Strategic Plan adopted by the Congo Board in 2002 and I quote: “CONGO's vision is to be the primary support and platform for a civil society represented by a global community of informed, empowered and committed NGOs that fully participate with the UN in decision-making and programs leading to a better, an economically and socially more just world...” We don't have a much better world yet, but we are well placed to provide guidance and support to NGOs worldwide that are committed to continuously working on it.

In addition, we are still facing the everlasting problem of financing adequate civil society participation in UN decision- making processes, particularly from the South. I sincerely hope that a General Fund for CS Participation in UN events – which has been promised to be established under the aegis of CONGO – will soon come nearer to realization.

While we move deeper into the Information/Knowledge Society and are faced with new issues such as climate change and other trans-national challenges, we need to adopt new strategies and think in new categories of partnerships. Our Assembly will be a welcomed and valuable occasion to take stock and plan ahead.

The recent Fora have helped to catapult CONGO on an ever higher level of performance and visibility. We need to consolidate CONGO's position in striving to open more spaces for civil society at all UN levels and continue to move from quantitative to qualitative contributions, from consultation to real partnership. **If we do not succeed in achieving this goal, the danger of Civil Society disengagement is a real one.** As Governments continue to debate UN Reform, we as CONGO need to ensure that civil society can not only observe, but actively participate and contribute substance. Within this framework we have to look at our new leadership, new Board members, including their capability and willingness to move CONGO forward.

Many actors, including some governments, today recognize the great importance of a strong participation of civil society in the activities of the United Nations. They are persuaded that the search for solutions to today's world challenges goes beyond the intergovernmental framework. It can only be met successfully in the framework of a strong partnership between all stakeholders, notably with civil society. We have to be ready and take up the challenge.

Renate Bloem  
President

