



**CONFERENCE OF NGOs
IN CONSULTATIVE RELATIONSHIP
WITH THE UNITED NATIONS**

**TRI-ANNUAL REPORT
2001 - 2003**

Geneva – New York – Vienna

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Presentation of CONGO

Brief History

CONGO was founded in 1948 in order to safeguard the rights of NGOs in consultative status, based upon article 71 of the UN Charter that provides that ECOSOC “May make suitable arrangements for consultation with NGOs which are concerned with matters within its competence”. ECOSOC established such arrangements by Resolution 288B (1950); revised it by Resolution 1296 (1968) and then replaced the latter by ECOSOC Resolution 1996/31 (1996). For over 50 years, CONGO has actively promoted and facilitated the participation and involvement of civil society organizations in the work of the United Nations and its agencies. More recently, CONGO has made a major push to influence and democratize global decision-making processes. Today, CONGO reaches out to NGOs around the world to facilitate and strengthen their efforts to deal more effectively with the important matters treated in United Nations fora. It seeks to strengthen and raise national NGOs’ voices at the global as well as the regional levels in support of the consensus reached at the various world conferences and exemplified in the Millennium Summit Declaration and the Development Goals (MDGs)

Membership

With almost 500 members (56 new applications since last year) representing all categories of NGOs (many of which are umbrella organizations themselves), at all levels (locally, nationally and internationally) and dealing with all major issues, CONGO is indeed a truly global organization and is well recognized as a most efficient interface between the UN and NGOs.

Mission

CONGO’s main purpose is to be a primary support for civil society represented by informed, empowered and committed NGOs to fully participate with the UN in decision making and implementation of programs leading to a more just, peaceful, diverse, sustainable, socially and economically responsible world. CONGO believes that a global civic ethic, based on core values that can unite people of all cultural, political, religious, or philosophical backgrounds should be the bed- rock for global governance. Global governance should be underpinned by human rights, gender equality and true democracy at all levels and ultimately by the rule of enforceable law.

The United Nations is the main intergovernmental body and the seat of policy formulation in the areas of economic and social development, peace and security. In order to give the governed an opportunity in these processes and their outcomes, it is crucial for NGOs and Civil Societies to actively participate at all levels of the UN mechanisms. CONGO can provide this access.

Strategies

Our strategic goals are to enhance: **Dialogue** to build partnership and synergy; **Outreach**, particularly in the global South; **Training and Capacity Building**; **Global Communications** and **Member Services**.

Partners in carrying out our mandate are: CONGO members, other ECOSOC status NGOs, Civil Society Organizations major groupings, other inter-governmental organizations and the United Nations, in particular its NGO Sections of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), Department of Public Information (DPI) and the Non Governmental Liaison Service (NGLS).

General Assembly

The General Assembly is the most important organ of the Conference and convenes every three years in order to establish CONGO's policy for the following triennium. The Assembly elects the President and 20 member organizations to serve on the Board.

CONGO's 22nd General Assembly will be held in Geneva on 4 – 6 December at the ILO building under the theme: *Inclusive Global Governance: Challenges and Opportunities for CONGO in Partnership with the United Nations*. The General Debate will include discussions relating to contextual problems facing the United Nations and NGOs, a dialogue with members of the UN - Civil Society High-level Panel and a focus on the Millennium Declaration and Development Goals.

Four Commissions dealing with Peace, Security and Disarmament; Human Rights; Sustainable Human Development and Information and Communication Technologies - all including a gender perspective and ethical values - will deepen the discussion and prepare for a call of action guiding CONGO into the next Triennium.

CONGO Committees

CONGO does not take position on substantive issues. However, it has established NGO Committees in Geneva, New York and Vienna that work on substantive issues in conformity with the objectives of the UN Charter. These range from human rights to development, peace and security, spiritual values, the status of women, etc. Committees are independent and their detailed list and activity reports can be found on our website (www.ngocongo.org).

Strategic Goals and Related Activities

CONGO's strategic goals for the years 2000 – 2003 had been set as follows:

1. Enhance the Dialogue
2. Reach out to the NGO Community
3. Training for NGOs
4. Improve Global Communication
5. Expand Member Services

1. Enhance the Dialogue: Participation in UN Conferences and major events

Throughout the years 2001 - 2003, CONGO has participated in the following main UN conferences and meetings:

1.1 World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance (September 2001)



Preparatory Process

CONGO has been involved throughout: at the General Assembly held in November 2000, CONGO adopted far reaching recommendations for its members to combat racism and intolerance; it helped many NGOs prepare for the Conference through events organized in Geneva, New York and Vienna. In

Vienna, CONGO organized an international seminar on racism and xenophobia in cooperation with all seven CONGO NGO Committees (Ageing, Crime Prevention, Development, Family; Narcotic Drugs, Peace and Status of Women) and adopted recommendations for the WCAR.

In New York, CONGO facilitated the creation of and served as secretariat to an Ad-Hoc- Committee against Racism which accompanied the preparatory process to the Conference and is currently institutionalizing itself as a CONGO Committee to discuss and implement follow-up strategies.

In Geneva, CONGO initiated, in cooperation with its long standing Committee against Racism, an open and transparent process through which INGOs were elected to serve on an International Steering Committee to prepare and help organize the Durban NGO Forum. CONGO also facilitated and chaired NGO Briefings throughout the PrepComs in Geneva and helped to set up an INGO Caucus. In addition the CONGO President participated in the European Regional Preparatory Meeting held in Strasbourg.

African Women's Voices

In an effort to keep the Beijing + 5 agenda alive, CONGO gave high priority throughout the year to the visibility and contribution of women from developing countries to the UN agenda, highlighting in particular African women's voices. When, as part of these efforts we sensed low representation of African women in the process leading to Durban, it became one of our priorities to ensure that they be present. We became partners in a pre-conference of African women held in Dakar in June. This met with a phenomenal success and resulted in the large turn out of African women at the Conference in Durban.

CONGO Activities in Durban

NGO Forum

During the NGO Forum, CONGO was responsible for space allocation and events held in the International Tent. Delegation members participated in various Panels and Commissions throughout the Forum as Resource persons. As CONGO we came together each morning and night to critically appraise the proceedings of the Forum. We prepared our statement to the Government Conference and developed strategies for the morning NGO Briefings we were to hold during the Official Conference. (When towards the end the of the Forum the process to adopt a final outcome of the Forum became so difficult, CONGO Executive Director a.i. participated in a small group to help smooth things out)

Conference

From the opening of the Conference to the last day CONGO helped organize (in cooperation with the NGO Liaison Office) and chair the morning briefings for NGOs during which space and opportunities were given to different caucuses to express their views and impact on the Conference. The Briefings included updates on the governmental negotiations from UN Officials and CONGO members who had been assigned to follow various Drafting sessions.

After the tumultuous Forum, where it seemed that every group was only interested to focus narrowly on its own cause with the loudest possible voice, efforts were made during these briefings to unite again, to listen to each other, to get the larger picture of what the conference was all about. Each morning a different member of the CONGO delegation chaired the briefing and was responsible for the program.

In addition, CONGO organized, sponsored and co-sponsored various parallel activities. We were involved in the program of the African women and the President participated as panelist in a Round Table discussion on "African Women's Voices". We also co-sponsored a panel on "War-affected Children and Racism: Strategies for Prevention".

CONGO's vision for the World Conference had been throughout the process one of a visionary tomorrow, of changing mentalities, of recognizing and respecting the 'other', of addressing and redressing wrongs of the past in order to meet the wrongs of the present. In this spirit we had planned, in addition to the other activities, a major panel event towards the end of the Conference, entitled: "Connecting the Disconnected, The Vision Forward" (7 September)

The CONGO President delivered a statement which captured our vision for the conference. Since then, as CONGO will have worked to keep this vision alive and we have prepared, together with our Committees, follow up strategies.

1.2 Capacity Building for the Informal NGO Regional Network in Africa (IRENE), Tunis, 8-11 January 2002

This meeting, jointly organized by the DESA/NGO Section and the NGO Tunisie 21, aimed at creating a network of NGOs in Africa in order to strengthen coordination, collaboration and capacity-building of these organizations at national, regional and international levels. Fifteen NGOs representing the five African sub-regions took part in the meeting. They had been selected on the basis of their activities in the priority

areas of work as identified by the Millennium Summit and for their role as coordinators of the work of other NGOs in their respective country.

AS CONGO had given high visibility to African NGOs and also wishes to create a CONGO regional presence in Africa, it was invited as an informal partner. The meeting created welcomed synergies and served to lay the groundwork for future cooperation. Follow-up steps have been to develop funding proposals for the realization of the agreed upon objectives, including inter alia:

- To build needed capacity among NGOs as well as reinforce existing skills and develop human resources
- To help build a sound resource base, including to strengthen the networking among NGOs, notably the use of ICT
- To establish a permanent dialogue and direct contacts between NGOs and the United Nations
- To assist in creating a conducive environment for NGOs to operate.

1.3 Role of NGOs in Multilateral Negotiations, Geneva, 20 February 2002

CONGO was invited to participate in a dialogue with diplomats from developing countries, currently posted in their respective Missions in Geneva, to speak about the role, potential and limitations of NGOs in multilateral negotiations. The meeting was organized by the Graduate Institute for International Studies (IUHEI). For CONGO it was a very welcomed event to create better understanding between the governmental and non-governmental sector and promote complementary action, in particular regarding implementation of commitments taken at major UN Conferences.

1.4 UBUNTU, Barcelona, 28 February – 2 March 2002

UBUNTU (African expression for humaneness, for being in harmony with all creation) is the name of a World Forum of Networks of Civil Society, established under the patronage of the former head of UNESCO, Federico Mayor. The objective is to strengthen the voice of civil society and reinforce the role of existing organizations with the ultimate aim to promote the construction of a new world order that is more just, peaceful, diverse and sustainable. While dialoguing with many participants who did not see yet their role defined in this framework, CONGO's role was clear: being the interface with the UN.

1.5 58th Commission on Human Rights, Geneva, 19 March – 26 April 2002



Ms Renate Bloem with Ms Mary Robinson

The 58th session of the Commission on Human Rights experienced great difficulties for a number of reasons. One was the dramatic cut back in Conference Services, due to economic hardship in the overall UN budget, which led to the suppression of all night sessions. 54 hours of speaking time were lost, which particularly affected the voices of NGOs. The Commission has become over the years the most important mechanism of the UN to which NGOs not only contribute and have full access but to which they bring the deep concerns and cries of people from all over the world. The Commission has

so far provided this unique space for NGOs to be heard, and CONGO is very concerned that the current restrictions will curtail to a great extent this voice.

CONGO immediately initiated, together with its Special Committee on Human Rights, a process of consultations, open letters, press conferences and ongoing discussions to meet the challenge to develop constructive proposals to help the Commission find its way back to effective functioning. CONGO therefore held discussions with members of the Bureau, other Government representatives, the

Secretariat and with the Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights. The question of how to safeguard the Charter based rights of NGOs in consultative status and how to accommodate meaningful contributions to UN meetings of the ever increasing number of ECOSOC NGOs is one of CONGO's most fundamental issues.

1.6 Second World Assembly on Ageing, Madrid, 7-10 April 2002



CONGO was well represented through its Focal Point, Past President Afaf Mahfouz, and its three Committees on Ageing from New York, Geneva and Vienna. CONGO addressed the closing session of the NGO Forum, was a panelist on a Round Table on Mainstreaming and was privileged to meet with the Secretary-General at a reception given by the King of Spain. The President used the opportunity to follow up on a letter she had addressed earlier to the SG regarding the concerns about NGO participation in the CHR.

1.7 NGO Forum to the ECOSOC High-Level Segment, New York, 14th June 2002

CONGO was asked to organize again the NGO Forum to the ECOSOC High-Level Segment, in cooperation with the DESA/NGO Section. The theme of the Forum was: "The contribution of human resources development, including in the area of health and education, to the process of development". It was an opportunity for representatives from UN-affiliated NGOs to convene and offer comments about the theme for the HLS of ECOSOC. The two part meeting included a panel discussion in the morning; NGOs then expressed recommendations for consideration by the Ministerial Declaration of the HLS, pertaining to gender equality and educating women, health, the need to establish new partnerships, peace and security, sustainable livelihood, literacy, ICTs, indigenous peoples and ageing. The full report is available at <http://www.un.org/esa/coordination/ecosoc/hl2002/ngo-forum-report.pdf>

1.8 International Policy Dialogue on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Berlin, 27-28 June 2002

This meeting, convened by UNDP, the German Foundation for International Development (DSE) and the Federal Ministry for Economic Co-operation and Development (BMZ), had three important objectives:

- Defining UN strategy on MDGs in concrete terms
- Discussing how MDGs could be made a key focus at the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD)
- Focussing attention on the content and meaning of the Millennium Declaration for all participants within their circles of influence

The UN strategy consists of three complimentary initiatives:

- The Millennium Project, a research initiative to provide a solid intellectual and analytical foundation for development policies. Professor Jeffrey Sachs, Columbia University, has been named by the Secretary General to head this project. He interacted with the Berlin meeting through a live video conference;
- The Millennium Reports, a comprehensive effort to oversee global and national progress, comprising a country-by-country assessment of progress towards meeting the MDGs, coordinated by UNDP;
- The Millennium Campaign, a special initiative aimed at building awareness and creating new coalitions for global and national action across developed and developing countries around the MDGs, headed by Eveline Herfkens, former Dutch Minister for Cooperation, recently appointed by the Secretary General as Special Adviser.

In the presentation CONGO held in Berlin (on our website) it was pointed out how NGOs/Civil Society have been involved in the formulation of the MDGs, through advocacy and impacting on the UN World Conferences of the 90s, the Millennium Forum and follow up, and offering suggestions as to how they should be involved in the new MDG strategy. The Berlin meeting became the springboard for one of CONGO's activities during the subsequent Johannesburg Summit.

1.9 First Preparatory Committee Meeting (PrepCom) of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), Geneva, 1-5 July 2002
Informal Intersessional Consultation (WSIS), Geneva, 16-18 September 2002
Informal Consultation with UNESCO (WSIS), Paris, 25 September 2002



This cluster deals with the process leading to the next UN World Summit on the Information Society to be held in two phases, one in Geneva from

10-12 December 2003 and the second in Tunis in 2005. (See also www.geneva2003.org; www.itu.int/wsisis; www.unesco.org/wsisis and NGLS Roundup July 2002)

Over 800 representatives from 133 UN Member States, including more than 150 NGOs and some business sector entities took part in PrepCom I to discuss rules and procedures guiding the process, as well as substance and content of the Conference. The vision for this new Summit was that Governments, Civil Society and the Private Sector would come together on an equal footing and negotiate an outcome defining our future societies.

However, when civil society/NGO representatives were excluded already from the discussion on rules and procedures, - including on arrangements for accreditation of NGOs and other actors - they angrily organized themselves in parallel as an active platform for lobbying and asked CONGO to chair the plenary meetings. Following a free-for-all discussion, a structure of Sub-Committees dealing with procedures, content, finance and media, as well as caucuses on gender, youth, regions and issues was created in an open ended way to provide for the most effective way to formulate NGO input into the process.

Many NGOs wish the agenda for the Information Society to be defined as broadly as possible, including a development agenda for bridging the digital gap to help eradicate poverty. Human rights prerogatives are demanded as core guiding principles. CONGO published five electronic newsletters, based on interviews with key actors on some of the pertinent issues. The newsletters can be found on our new website: <http://www.ngocongo.org/newsletters.htm>

Since Governments could not agree on the themes proposed for the agenda during the PrepCom I, an **Informal Intersessional Consultation** was held on 16-18 September. NGOs were invited to speak and to be present, but only during the first day. Following a CONGO intervention on this renewed exclusion, the Chair of the PrepCom, Mr. Adama Samassekou, Mali, started a very proactive dialogue with Civil Society representatives present to rebuild trust. He wants to continue this dialogue on-line, see www.geneva2003.org

Other preparations were made for regional preparatory meetings:

- Bamako, Mali 28-30 May 2002, regional meeting for Africa
- Bucharest, 7-9 November 2002, for the ECE region (where CONGO was present: see the newsletter at <http://www.ngocongo.org/newsletters.htm>)
- Tokyo, 13-15 January 2003 for Asia and
- Santo Domingo, 27-30 January 2003 for Latin America.

CONGO has included the WSIS agenda in the Asian Civil Society Forum.

Pan European Regional Conference: Bucharest (Romania) 7-9 November 2002
www.wsis-romania.ro



View of the Bucharest Meeting Plenary

In following up on the role CONGO had played during the first PrepCom (July 2002) and the Inter-sessional Meeting (September 2002), CONGO participated in this regional meeting. The President was invited as a panelist on an interactive dialogue between governments, civil society and the private sector to spell out the vision for WSIS. She also chaired the sessions on civil society, as part of the official program, together with her colleague, the Convener of

the European Caucus. Although the host country government made all efforts to be accommodating to civil society, to be open and inclusive in its programme, these CS sessions, well attended, including by governments, made painfully clear that the overall participation of CS in the WSIS process was not yet satisfactory. CS had not found an organized mechanism for input into the drafting process and with that into the outcome document.

Asia-Pacific Regional Conference: Tokyo (Japan), 13-15 January 2003
www.wsis-japan.jp

CONGO did not officially participate in this regional meeting. However, some participants of the Asian Civil Society Forum (ACSF) previously held in Bangkok became major actors in Tokyo. ACSF had served as venue for raising awareness about the WSIS and at the same time helped NGOs to prepare for the Regional PrepCom in Tokyo. It is worth noting that the report from the Bangkok Forum's discussion on the WSIS had been taken into account as an important contribution to the Tokyo meeting. Also, the CONGO methodology applied to arrive at the final outcome document in Bangkok led participants in Tokyo to apply the same method. Moreover, the NGOs active in Tokyo succeeded to persuade governments to turn the Governmental Drafting Committee into an "informal group" in which they could participate.

The compilation of all outcome papers from regional meetings, (including Africa, Latin America and Arab Countries) as well as a non-paper from the PrepCom President, Adama Samassekou, served as basis documents for negotiations at PrepCom 2, as commented further below.

Second PrepCom of the World Summit on the Information Society (Geneva)
17–28 February 2003.



Ms Renate Bloem with Mr Adama Samassekou, resident of the WSIS Prepcoms

This PrepCom constituted a historic breakthrough in UN-NGO relations when for the first time a Civil Society Bureau was established as a counterpart to the Governmental Bureau. The WSIS context is tripartite: it seeks to create an exchange platform between governments, civil society (CS) and the private sector.

Following the many discussions at various regional levels and other preparatory meetings on effective and inclusive CS participation, the

WSIS Secretariat had proposed to create a Civil Society Bureau of limited size and similar to the Governmental Bureau, in order to facilitate the dialogue between the sectors as well as to help channel civil society's contribution into the process and Summit itself.

Since there is no unanimously accepted definition of the term "civil society", the Secretariat referred to the one given by the UN Joint Inspection Unit with the notion that it covers the entities of the third sector (distinct from the State and from the private sector) and came up with different families (see www.prepcom.net), each representing different sections and constituencies within the wide range of CS.

CONGO was elected to represent the NGO family and then led a process in which each of the families had to identify a focal point to serve on this new Bureau. In the end, CONGO was also asked to chair the Bureau during PrepCom2.

Patterned after the Governmental Bureau, the functions of the CS Bureau are procedural, in that it deals with organizational/administrative matters related to the various dimensions of the preparatory process and the Summit itself. The first result was that CSOs' substantive contributions were channeled and included in the official Outcome Document of PrepCom 2.

The whole process was hailed by most of the Governments and NGO/CSOs as historic and as a major step forward. It also caught the attention of the media and was widely reported on in the press.

In addition to this process, CONGO organized three well attended lunch-time panel discussions on:

"The Power of information to promote a culture for peace",
"WSIS – the Vision – UN Reform", with the attendance of PrepCom President Adama Samassekou as panelist and, in

cooperation with the CONGO Panel and NGO Forum for Health, **"The Role of Information Society in Health".**



Geneva Newspaper on CONGO during the WSIS Prepcom 2.

Third PrepCom of the World Summit of the Information Society (Geneva) 15-26 September 2003

To help newcomers find their way, CONGO organized a comprehensive orientation session on 12th September.

Expectations were high among civil society activists about the effectiveness of the institutional arrangements we created in order for civil society to participate in the shape of the Declaration and Plan of Action of the WSIS: the Civil Society Bureau, the Content and Themes Group and the Civil Society Plenary. We all hoped that these mechanisms would lead us "from input to impact". However, after two weeks of extensive networking and intensive negotiations, feelings among representatives of civil society organizations were mixed. Even though everybody welcomes the creation of these institutional arrangements, their effectiveness still needs to be improved to channel successfully our input. There is a real danger that they are seen as a simple cosmetic operation that concretely doesn't help channelling our aspirations.

And civil society has some reasons to be frustrated. The suggestions it has made for input into the Summit Declaration and Plan of Action during the Intersessional Meeting in Paris have almost completely been overlooked and ignored by governments. The emphasis NGOs and civil society organizations attach to human rights in the information society and to the fact that this is explicitly mentioned in the outcome documents of the Summit has not been taken over in the official negotiations. The importance we attach to the concept of internet governance and to having an information society that doesn't focus exclusively on technology but that is open to the needs of all people has also been overlooked. The Plan of Action, in its

present status, won't help humanity bridging the digital divide. Concretely, while civil society proposed to put people at the centre of the information society, the draft Declaration and Plan of Action are still bureaucratic and technology-driven. From 86 recommendations made by civil society during the Paris Meeting, 49, i.e. more than 60 per cent, have been totally ignored. Among the most important items that have disappeared, we can quote the importance of local authorities and communities in developing their own local content; the unhampered and unfiltered access to publicly available resources without manipulation and control; freedom of information as a means to reduce corruption; special needs for developing countries and non-commercial groups in frequency allocations.

Yet thanks to the existence of the Civil Society Bureau, representatives of the "families" were able to prepare the meeting with the Intergovernmental Bureau and convey to them our common general feeling of frustration. Even though as CS we don't share the same views on all issues, we were able to speak out with "one voice" and echo this voice also in a large way in front of the press.

But to be more effective in our negotiation style we have to improve the functioning of internal democracy. It is not easy to organize the expression of so many points of view, which will naturally be divergent. Transparency in decision-making, accountability to one's constituency and legitimacy of the organizations elected to represent the "families" in the Bureau are issues that are not solved once for ever. To some extent civil society still needs to learn "the rules of the game". Governments are often well disposed and willing to cooperate with us, but governmental delegates don't have the same flexibility as we do to propose, negotiate and adopt any proposal. Most of the time, they have to refer to their capitals for approval, whereas we are able to take decisions more quickly and defend our points of view. Hence the need for civil society and NGOs to carry on the lobbying activity even at this late stage at the national level on the one hand and prepare a minimum rock bottom document for the last negotiation round in November on the other.

1.10 ECOSOC Coordination Segment, New York, 10-12 July 2002

CONGO had been invited to contribute to the theme on 'Strengthening of ECOSOC' during the Coordination Segment of the July Substantive Session. Various NGO consultations were held in Geneva and New York that helped CONGO to compile different proposals. CONGO's President delivered a statement on 11 July that was well received. She used her stay in New York to meet with the President of ECOSOC, Ambassador Simonovich, to discuss NGO and process-oriented issues regarding NGO participation at all ECOSOC levels, but also processes in relation to the Security Council and the General Assembly.

1.11 World Civil Society Forum, Geneva, 15-20 July 2002

This Forum brought together NGOs from many parts of the world. Although it lived not quite up to its name, it became nevertheless a very important resource Forum for grass root NGOs. CONGO had been asked to take responsibility for the UN/NGO co-operation part and organized sessions on Charter based rights for NGOs, consultative status, Millennium Forum and follow up, and the President was invited to address the Opening Ceremony. Regional Focal Points from the WCSF were then involved in the ACSF.

1.12 Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and First UN Social Forum Geneva, 24 July - 16 August 2002

Following the WCSF, a number of young media students felt attracted by CONGO's potential and helped produce the second series of CONGO Newsletters during the

Sub-Commission on Human Rights, in particular highlighting the first ever held UN Social Forum that was organized thanks to the leadership of the CONGO Special Committee on Human Rights in association with NGLS.

1.13 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), Johannesburg, 26 August – 4 September 2002



CONGO first participated in PrepCom III (March New York) and PrepCom IV (May/June Bali) to have discussions with the South African Host Committee of the WSSD and with the International Steering Committee and it followed closely the process of the “multi-stakeholder-dialogue”. Since the Rio Conference the “major groups” participation was meant to be the way for civil society involvement in the process to Johannesburg, which includes both NGOs and the private sector.

The outcome of the WSSD itself was hailed by some as great success, by others as a great failure, depending on the issue/geographical perspective. (see www.johannesburgsummit.za) The most complex agenda ever dealt with in one Conference: social and economic development and environmental protection, all in one basket, made for difficult negotiations. The methods applied with track I (government negotiations) and track II (partnerships with Civil Society) outcomes were innovative, although suspicious to many NGOs, fearing that Governments tried to shy away from their responsibilities, leaving too much to the private sector. Kofi Annan summed it all up by saying: “Much has been achieved, more needs to be done. This is only the beginning”.

Civil Society’s impact on the Conference was fragmented, due to many factors, including long distances between the different venues. CONGO tried to bridge between those NGOs who worked as ‘major groups’ (however limited) at the government Convention Centre at Sandton and those hundreds of NGOs who had come together at the Global Peoples’ Forum at Nasrec. CONGO also negotiated successfully with governments and UN Officials during the first days at Sandton to avoid an embarrassing NGO boycott or walk-out after security officials had denied access to the Convention Centre.

As member of the International Steering Group (ISG), set up to organize the Peoples’ Forum, CONGO organized one of the Forum’s Official Commissions: MDGs and Sustainable Development, which included eminent speakers such as Jeffrey Sachs. CONGO participated in a number of other panels, including in the UBUNTU-led campaign on Reform of International Institutions and in the evening strategy meetings of the ISG.

CONGO also hosted a coffee reception for all interested NGOs to acquaint them with our activities and consultative status and inform on the Asia Civil Society Forum.

CONGO produced again 5 electronic newsletters, giving our members the opportunity to get very special information from the Summit.

Back in Geneva, CONGO organized on 4th October a first consultation on the Summit with reflections from NGOs and UN Agencies to inform and evaluate the outcome.

1.14 55th Annual Conference DPI/NGO Conference: *Rebuilding Societies Emerging from Conflict*, New York, 9 –11 September 2002

CONGO was invited to address the Opening Session and a Luncheon information for speakers of the event, hosted by Nane Annan, (SG’s wife), available at <http://www.ngocongo.org/president.htm>

1.15 World Social Forum in Porto Alegre (23-28 January 2003)
www.portoalegre2003.org



Porto Alegre Workshop organised by CONGO.

Responding to a request from some of our members to provide, as CONGO, a framework for a workshop on UN Reform, CONGO participated in the 3rd

World Social Forum in Porto Alegre. The objective was to carry with our members the message of critical support for the United Nations to the largest gathering of civil society, an audience that becomes more and more important, but is completely outside of the UN. Some call it the third generation of civil society. With their claim for more justice and their slogan: "Another world is possible", they have become 'incontournable'.

CONGO organized a workshop on: **"United Nations Reform: *transparent-democratic-participatory*. NGO expectations/visions/hopes towards a renewed UN"** The President also participated in a panel, organized by UBUNTU, on the Reform Campaign of International Institutions. She was also invited and connected to the organizers of the Youth camp (40'000 participants.)

1.16 59th Session of the Commission on Human Rights (CHR 17 March – 25 April 2003)



First and last Commission for Mr Sergio Vieira De Mello

The six weeks session of the Commission is for all participants an exhaustive but highly important event. Following last year's session, which had a disastrous effect on NGO participation because of sudden time cuts imposed upon the Commission and the resulting poor time management, a consultative process took place throughout the year. It was initiated by the extended Bureau of the Commission, in cooperation with the Office of the High

Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). CONGO and other NGOs fully participated in this process. The results were recommendations from the outgoing to the incoming extended Bureau, which were then adopted by the CHR, carrying many NGO proposals such as:

- Election of the new Bureau three months ahead of the Commission to better prepare for the session;
- A high-level segment of three days at the beginning of the Commission, to better accommodate (with less time given to) Heads of States and other dignitaries; (to be held in the General Assembly Hall)
- Interactive dialogue with Special Rapporteurs on their specific mandates;
- Speaking time divided equally: double time to members of the Commission, half the time to all observers, including governments, IGOs and NGOs.

While these new procedural measures proved to be somehow satisfactory, at least worthwhile to pursue and improve, the political climate surrounding the Commission made for even more politicization of the debate than in the past. The African Group's proposal (it was their turn) to name the Libyan Ambassador as Chair of the Commission, provoked already in the fore-field of the Commission a highly mediatized debate, given the Human Rights record of that country. When then the Ambassador, Najat Al- Hajjaji opened the Commission and with it the HLS, one NGO (Reporters without Borders) showered from the galleries hundreds of leaflets to criticize her at her position. Whatever the motive of this NGO for such provocation might have been, it was the wrong moment and space. It reflected badly on NGOs (not knowing procedures) and was not even effective. The Libyan Ambassador took it graciously, (she turned out altogether to be a very good chair), but the NGO ended up with a complaints procedure before the Committee on NGOs and promptly had its status revoked (for a year). Another NGO (CONGO member) had addressed letters to all UN missions asking them to prevent the election of the Libyan candidate and ended up equally before the NGO Committee.

However, the real political bomb shell was the outbreak of the war in Irak and its political consequences that divided the Commission and made it even impossible to have a special sitting on Irak.

Throughout the Commission CONGO :

- provided space for NGOs to discuss the multiple issues regarding this war, and while most of them were united to condemn the illegitimacy of waging this war, NGO voices representing victims of Saddam Hussein's oppressive regime were also heard;
- organized an orientation session at the beginning and then regular briefings throughout the Commission, including an assessment session at the end;
- supported or organized a number of panels in cooperation with its Special Committee on Human Rights and its Committee on the Status of Women, including a session on "NGO accountability", a first in a series;
- prepared a statement, delivered by the President, on regional mechanisms, bringing to the attention of the Commission the potentials of the Asian Civil Society Forum, which had already been lauded as a pilot initiative by the Thai Deputy Foreign Minister in his speech at the High-level Segment;
- responded to an invitation by the Chair of the UN Committee on NGOs, Mihaela Blajan, who attended for the first time the CHR. She, together with Hanifa Mezoui, Chief of the NGO section, had invited CONGO, its Officers and Committee Chairs for an open discussion on concerns regarding the Commission. Ricardo Espinoza, NGO Liaison Geneva, was also present;
- created a special website www.room17.org together with our partners, ICV, and other volunteers, to provide the most extensive coverage of the Commission from an NGO perspective.

1.17 56th World Health Assembly (WHA 19-28 May 2003)



Many debates on SRAS during the WHA56

Two items on the agenda of WHA were of great interest to CONGO:

1. the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control
2. the Civil Society Initiative

1. At the beginning of the campaign for the Framework Convention in 1999, then CONGO President Afaf Mahfouz and the incumbent President were invited by Dr. Brundtland, WHO, to participate in a conference in Kobe, Japan. The conference had as its objective to create alliances with NGOs against the tobacco industry that more and more targeted young persons in developing countries, in particular girls, into tobacco dependency. The conference also aimed at getting support for a convention that would be a first ever for WHO to create a legally binding instrument that would help fighting corporate behaviour in the battle over the health burden of tobacco related illnesses. At this year's World Health Assembly, after years of difficult negotiations, the Framework Convention was adopted without reservations and claimed as a major victory by WHO, governments and NGOs alike. All government speakers lauded the tremendous contributions the NGO community had made towards this achievement.
2. WHO, recognizing that "Health for All" is more than a medical issue, created under Dr. Brundland a small department, the "Civil Society Division". Its objective was to open WHO which currently keeps special relations with a limited number of NGOs (mainly bio-medical ones) to a larger section of civil society, in particular for advocacy purposes. The Division undertook a large number of consultations, including with CONGO and some of its Committees, which resulted in a draft resolution - guided by some of the ECOSOC criteria-, for adoption at this Assembly. The proposal distinguished between relations with NGOs on the ground for operational purposes and relations for accreditation of International NGOs at WHO meetings, mainly its Executive Board (EB) and Assembly. The Draft text had already been passed by the EB with recommendation for adoption. However, last minute extensive amendments by China, which feared opening doors for Taiwan NGOs, and queries by NGOs themselves that the text did not distinguish clearly enough between NGOs and the private sector -a point which was then taken up by Ghana in the official discussion - led to the deferral of the proposal until next year's Assembly. Whether enough political will to renegotiate can then be mustered, remains to be seen.
Beyond these two items, CONGO covered the whole Assembly and created yet another new interactive section of our website: www.wha56.org. The President co-chaired a NGO meeting with the NGO Forum for Health on the challenges of Primary Health Care, 25 years after Alma Ata and used the opportunity to network extensively with members of the growing Peoples' Health Movement.

1.18 Dialogue with High-level Panel, (HLP)

New York 4-9 May 2003

Following the mandate given by the Board to appoint a CONGO-level Panel, we contacted CONGO members with wide range experience in the subject and asked them to send preliminary points. We had also written a letter to President Cardoso, spelling out some of our concerns, at the same time offering our cooperation. The President was invited to speak on a Panel (8 May) organized by the DPI during the Sustainable Development Commission (CSD) in New York. Other panelists included John Clark, the newly appointed coordinator for the HLP and Zera Aydin, Secretariat Support Person.

The DPI Panel launched the official debate, which was complemented by smaller briefings with Juan Mayr, another HLP member, who happened to be in New York during the CSD as former Chair of the Commission. All encounters with the HLP were extremely positive and marked by openness and transparency.

Geneva, 27 May

In response to our letter, President Cardoso sent his personal advisor, Miguel Darcy de Oliveira, to meet with some CONGO officials when he was on his way to New

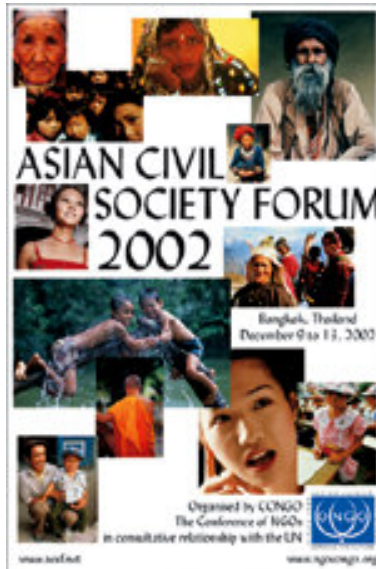
York. Rather than a big meeting he preferred to have an in depth discussion with a few members. It was a very frank, warm and valuable exchange. The President handed him the contributions she had until then received from CONGO- level Panel.

Geneva, NGLS Consultation, 4-6 June

NGLS had invited some key NGOs to a consultation on “Global Governance in Crisis; challenges for the United Nations and Global Civil Society”. Part of the program was dedicated to a discussion on the HLP. John Clark and Kumi Naidoo were present. Later, the President and Anselmo Lee facilitated a session that went into more depth of the issue.

2. Reach Out to the NGO Community

2.1 Asian Civil Society Forum



The Asian Civil Society Forum took place from the 9th to the 13th of December 2002 in Bangkok, Thailand. It was organized by CONGO through its Working Group on Outreach to Asia and was hosted by Forum Asia, an NGO covering human rights issues in Asia. The theme of the Forum was: *UN/NGO Partnerships for Democratic Governance: Building Capacities and Networks for Human Rights and Sustainable Development*. Its objectives were:

- To promote cooperation and solidarity among NGOs in Asia engaged in advocacy activities in the UN;
- To raise the awareness of Asian NGOs about the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and to assess their contribution to their implementation;
- To facilitate proactive dialogue and debate among NGOs on the issues concerning UN/NGO partnership for democratic governance at all levels;
- To provide NGOs with practical and innovative training about advocacy in the UN;
- To assess the impact and implementation in Asia of UN Conferences, such as the UN Millennium Summit 2000, World Conference against Racism (WCAR) 2001 and World Conference on Sustainable Development (WSSD) 2002;
- To develop NGOs' strategies in ensuring that governments' pledges made at the UN conferences are fully implemented.

The Forum received financial support from the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Development Cooperation of the Netherlands, the Open Society Institute of the Soros Foundation and some CONGO members. UNDP, the Ford Foundation China and Kyung Hee University supported some NGOs with whom they are used to collaborate.

Additionally, it has received the **technical and political support** of the Thai Government, the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and several UN Agencies including the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Participants

In its internal evaluation, CONGO considers the Forum to have been a great success. Gathering together a total of 572 participants from 33 countries has far

exceeded everyone's optimistic expectations. Given the particular situation in Afghanistan and the urgent need to strengthen an emergent civil society, four Afghan NGO representatives attended the Forum. It is worth noting that most NGOs have come by their own means (CONGO was able to support 148 participants), which is not only proof of their interest in the issues that were dealt with but also of the timeliness of the Forum. Participation was balanced in terms of geographical spread and gender, even though some countries came with a relatively larger "delegation" such as India, Korea, the Philippines and other places with a strong and vibrant civil society.

Another interesting point is that most of the NGOs represented were not accredited with the UN - hence not CONGO members. Also, many of them were participating in an international conference of this kind for the first time. Judging from the scope and nature of the organizations represented, the target of reaching out to grassroots organizations that are active especially at the local and national levels, seems to have been achieved. However, this means that most of the participants have not done much advocacy work within the UN system. Therefore the Forum has, to a large extent, provided the much-needed opportunity for exposure to and learning about the workings of the UN in relation to the many global issues that find their expression at the local and most basic level in society. At the end of the Forum, a great number of participants expressed serious interest in developing international advocacy work in relation to the UN.

Impact of ACSF 2002

An evaluation questionnaire has been sent to the participants of the Forum and most of them affirm that:

- ACSF 2002 has contributed to achieving synergies and a better understanding between the two core issues of human rights and sustainable development;
- ACSF 2002 has achieved its main objective, namely strengthening UN/NGO partnerships;
- ACSF 2002 has been useful in understanding and improving mechanisms of democratic governance at the global level;
- ACSF 2002 has been successful in building capacities and networks for human rights and sustainable development;
- ACSF has had a good impact in contributing to achieve more democratic governance at the global level.



Daily newsletters were produced and distributed during the Asian Civil Society Forum

Furthermore, most of the participants, after participating at ACSF 2002, see the need to foster greater collaboration and engagement with the United Nations. With regard to CONGO, the participants affirmed the potential role of CONGO as facilitator of NGO participation in the UN and therefore as a means to strengthen their international advocacy work. At the same time, many of them believe that a follow-up of the ACSF at national, sub-regional and global levels would help greatly in striving to assume a greater

role for international civil society within the UN structure, its mechanisms and processes.¹

2.2 Latin American and Caribbean Consultation (LACC)

In March 2004, CONGO will host a regional consultation in Santiago de Chile, on “The Millennium Development Goals in Latin America and the Caribbean: Partnerships for a New Era”, that will consist of a two-day capacity-building session for NGOs and a three-day conference for NGOs, academia, the UN and participants from the public and private sectors.

The two-day session will provide NGOs with specific information about working with the UN, as well as information about the MDGs and workshops on fundraising, program development and evaluation and communications. The three-day conference will provide the capacity for NGOs to develop and work alongside other actors already engaged in the MDGs in various ways and to bring synergy into the MDG project.

The CONGO New York Office has so far worked extensively for the preparations of the consultation.

2.3 High-level Consultation and Capacity Building Workshop for the UN-NGO Informal Regional Network (IRENE) in Eastern Europe (28 – 31 May 2003)

In accordance with its outreach goals and building on the successful ACSF project, similar proposals have been developed for Eastern Europe and Africa. Vienna is beginning to work on Eastern Europe.

In this context it was highly important that CONGO was invited as partner to the High-level Consultation in Bucharest (28-31May) organized by the NGO Section (DESA) to launch the Informal Regional Network for Eastern Europe. The informal contacts with the NGOs, local organizers and Roumanian and other attending Ambassadors have been most helpful to build on for our own outreach program, scheduled for the middle of next year.

2.4 Youth Advisory Committee (YAC)

Young people have insufficient access to the UN. There are minimal mechanisms for participation, often not suited to young people or youth-led organizations. Young people feel that their voices are not heard on matters concerning them. For this reason, CONGO initiated a process that recently led to the creation of a Youth Advisory Committee (YAC) which consists of 15 young individual persons but 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.

3. Training of NGOs

CONGO has continued its long-standing activity of training for NGOs, particularly during the Commission on the Status of Women and the Commission on Human

¹ For additional information on the Forum itself, please refer to www.acsf.net

Rights. In addition CONGO organized side-events both at the CSW and CHR and trained on the mechanisms.

During the Asian Civil Society Forum CONGO has conducted a two day parallel training on human rights mechanisms and on how to work with the UN.

4. Global Communication

In April 2002, CONGO recruited a Communication Officer to enhance timely and efficient communication with its members, its NGO Committees and the NGO Community beyond. Supported by occasional Interns the Communication Officer was charged with:

- (1) the coverage of UN meetings and conferences from an NGO perspective,
- (2) the promotion of the NGOs' Committees meetings and events and
- (3) the development of the CONGO activities and its image.

(1) In this area particular attention was given to the coverage of the UN Commission on Human Rights, subsidiary bodies such as the Sub-Commission and the Working Group on Indigenous Population; the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development, the Bangkok Asian Civil Society Forum and the 3 Preparatory Committee Meetings (PrepComs) of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS). Articles, Reports and Interviews were published in Daily Newsletters, on the CONGO website or some specific websites produced exclusively for these events. Thanks to innovative partnerships with other NGOs who helped as volunteer reporters or individual technicians, CONGO was able to produce comprehensive and well searched website information on www.room17.org; www.wha56.org; www.acsf.net; www.prepcom.net

(2) The CONGO NGOs Committees in Geneva, New York and Vienna benefited from the Communication work that gave them the possibility to promote their profile, objectives and work. Since the beginning of year 2003, each Committee has a specific section on the CONGO website to serve as a Committee website. The communication officer collected information from the Committees and updating their related web sections respectively.

(3) The Communication work included CD-Roms of all CONGO newsletters, design of a new brochure and posters for CONGO events. CONGO's image and visibility has thus been raised, also through the establishment of a French and (beginning) Spanish version. (www.ngocongo.org)

5. Membership Status and New Members

- As of November 2003, we have 440 full and 53 associate member organizations.
- Between Jan. 2001 and November 2003, CONGO recruited 175 new members.
- Between Jan. 2001 and November 2003, CONGO lost 6 member organizations

6. Staff

CONGO's activities are run by the three CONGO offices, in Geneva, New York and Vienna, with the bulk of them being carried out by the President's Office in Geneva.

The Geneva office was under the leadership of Renate Bloem, President, with the following staff:

Isolda Agazzi Ben Attia
Sheila Bordier
Kouraich Jaouahdou
Occasional interns

Programme Officer
Administrative Coordinator
Communication Officer

The CONGO Office in New York was run by the First Vice-President, Leslie Wright with 1 staff person and interns and the CONGO Office in Vienna by the Vice – President Marlene Parenzan.

7. Finances

Funds were provided by:

- CONGO Memberships dues and special contributions by members
- The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)
- The German Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- The Ministry of Development Cooperation of the Netherlands
- The Soros Foundation