

61st Annual DPI/NGO Conference: Working paper

Context:

The 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights provides an opportunity to reach out to all members of society, to reflect on the values set forth in the UDHR, their relevance today, and to question why these values are not being upheld universally, and how we can make a difference.

In order to awaken this awareness, it is vital to move away from theoretical approaches, towards an inclusive and action oriented forum where all stakeholders have a voice and are asked to envision the steps that would be required to address the current disparities between policy and implementation.

It is therefore crucial that we involve persons with direct experience in human rights issues, who can impart their experiences and how they have coped, offering profound insight into the reality of human rights issues worldwide.

Through the 61st Annual DPI/NGO Conference, we can create the framework for discussions that are forward thinking, exploring civil society contributions to advancing the respect for human rights, and examining how we can enhance civil society's efforts including through a constructive self-critical approach.

The DPI/NGO Conference can help foster a new mindset around human rights, encouraging greater awareness of the state of human rights in the world today, and opening up opportunities for people to identify and take part in solutions.

Overview:

For the past 60 years, the DPI/NGO Conference has been held at the UN's New York Headquarters, and in recent years, has welcomed up to 2000 representatives of non-governmental organizations.

The 61st Annual DPI/NGO Conference will be held in Paris from 3-5 September 2008 in commemoration of the 60th anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, marking the first time in the history of the Conference that it will be held outside of New York.

The choice of Paris as the venue for the 61st Conference, as well as the subject matter of Human Rights, raises several opportunities for consideration, including Outreach to new constituencies who have not participated in previous Conferences, namely civil society from regions that are typically under-represented, such as Africa and the Middle East, due to distance, difficulty with visas and language barriers.

Building on the momentum on the 60th Anniversary of the UDHR, we should also envision how the DPI/NGO Conference can contribute to raising public awareness about Human Rights beyond the UN affiliated NGO community.

In addition to NGOs, the Conference could offer opportunities for other sectors that can impact the awareness of HR issues (i.e. media, academia, entertainment industry, philanthropy, religious and spiritual constituencies) and that have a role in the implementation of HR (i.e. Member States, local government, parliamentarians, legal sector) to become involved.

The space available at UNESCO Headquarters can accommodate the general format of the Conference, including opening and closing ceremonies, overflow room, panels and round tables, midday workshops and other informal settings for networking and off the record discussions.

Goals:

Create an action oriented Conference:

- Participants should not be passive observers, but instead should be encouraged and given the opportunity to actively engage in discussions and problem solving with invited speakers
- To that end, participants could be asked to identify ahead of time which topics are of greatest interest to them
- Panels should feature a limited number of speakers to allow for more question and answer time
- Speakers could be asked to formulate their presentations in ways that will engage the audience, posing questions and challenges to them
- In addition to formal meetings, informal off the record discussion settings could be enabled through "conversation lounges"

Strengthen civil society efforts to advance the respect for human rights:

- in the lead up to the conference, a subcommittee of the planning committee could focus on gathering data of civil society efforts that have been successful
- the conference could highlight current situations where civil society could assume a more active role in promoting respect for human rights
- the conference could aim to identify what obstacles faced by civil society could be overcome (how can NGOs be more effective, increase their ability to partner with one another when working in the same area, avoid duplication of activities, increase strategic planning and pooling of limited resources for the benefit of the target community)
- members of communities at the center of human rights violations (past or present) could be invited to speak from their experience in this regard

Reach out to civil society beyond the UN NGO community:

- a subcommittee of the planning committee could identify groups that are underrepresented in most UN NGO fora and whose experiences and insights should inform or be informed by our discussions
- these groups could include ethnic or religious minorities, socially and economically marginalized communities in both developing and developed countries, youth and older persons, women from areas of conflict, young entrepreneurs and business leaders, human rights victims and defenders, parliamentarians, local authorities, media, philanthropists
- preparatory events could be hosted by various partners in academia and other organizations to increase outreach and feed into the conference by

- producing a paper on key findings of the event and sending one or two representatives to the conference
- a subcommittee could identify organizations that work with key constituencies at the grass roots and that could commit to helping to receive input from them and potentially sponsor their participation at the conference
- NGOs could be encouraged to include a representative from the grassroots as part of their delegation to the conference
- Efforts should be made to assess and attend to the interpretation needs of participants
- In parallel to the conference, events and installations that are accessible to the broad public such as a fair of NGOs, exhibits and concerts could be hosted

Increase awareness and sensitize society globally to human rights issues:

- the conference could include a focus on strategies to promote human rights education
- the conference could examine ways in which traditional and alternative media could generate a global commitment to respect for human rights, and why this is or is not happening as of yet
- the dimension of spirituality and inner transformation as central to the fulfillment of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights could be highlighted, and the Conference could include a non-religious silent meditation for peace and human rights
- Leading human rights organizations could be asked to examine what messages they want to communicate to the broad public and how they consider their messages are being received

Enhance civil society engagement with the existing international mechanisms for Human Rights:

- NGOs that interact with existing international and national human rights bodies, as well as representatives and members of those entities, could be invited to share their experiences and reflect on ways to improve civil society engagement

Suggested themes and perspectives:

Aiming to assess how the status of respect for human rights has evolved since the signing of the UDHR, what challenges are being confronted today, how to define our present goals, and how we can be empowered to achieve them, some of the suggested themes / perspectives to address at the Conference have included:

Universality, Dignity, Justice, the rule of law

Dignity and Justice for All of Us has been adopted by UNOHCHR as the guiding theme for the commemoration;

The outcomes of the series of dialogues being hosted by UNOHCHR could be acknowledged at the Conference and feed into the planning process;

The gap between existing human rights policy and implementation;

Anti-corruption;

Extreme poverty;

The interlinkage between socio-economic and civil and political rights;

Right to decent work

Human rights in a world without borders

Understanding human rights in the context of the globalized world – w addressing Migration; Trafficking; Climate change; Information technology; Business from a Human Rights perspective;

highlighting the need for human transformation to adapt to the challenges and opportunities of the future;

Questioning where power would lie in a world without frontiers as we have known them and which organizations are or have the capacity to become truly universal and all encompassing

Peace as a Human Right and Human rights in the context of the war on terror

In light of the impact on human rights resulting from measures being taken in the name of security and the war on terror, how to encourage the pursuit of peace rather than the perpetration of fear and violence

Human rights education

How to foster human rights education worldwide and at all levels? What are the existing models, what strategies can be utilized to further promote human rights education? The role of human rights education in building peaceful societies and promoting development

Gender Equality

What initiatives should be taken or strengthened, recognizing that achieving women's empowerment and gender equality is vital to improving the status of human rights worldwide?

Impacting the way human rights are represented in the media

How to sustain the interest of the media and ensure more accurate and in-depth reporting

Human rights and economics

The complex relationship between economic interests and human rights – how to promote respect for human rights in a profit driven environment – what tools can be implemented to promote ethical behavior on the part of governments, corporations and to empower civil society?

The Universal Declaration of Human rights as a Collection of Values

Building on the universality of human rights and of the Declaration itself, as a collection of values, how can respect for HR become a unifying factor regardless of religious or cultural tradition?

Crosscutting questions:

What opportunities are, or can be made available for civil society, in partnership with local government, religious or educational institutions, and the private sector, to improve respect for human rights at the local level, even in the absence of strong political institutions, or in economically depressed areas, or zones of conflict?

Examples of civil society efforts in fields such as reconciliation, peacebuilding, and entrepreneurship could be highlighted, and ways to increase collaboration among NGOs working in the same area, with a view to pooling resources, sharing responsibilities, avoiding duplication of efforts and improving strategic planning and development of local capacity, could be explored.

Format:

Opening Ceremony

Round tables

Midday workshops

Conversation Lounges (off the record discussions on-going throughout the Conference to address issues in greater depth, moderators with arbitration skills can be on hand to engage as needed)

Ceremony to pay homage to human rights defenders

Silent Meditation

Networking

Receptions

Performances

Exhibits and public fairs

Example:

NGO Human rights fair; what moves you? NGO voices exhibits; human rights cartoons

Press Conferences

Parallel meetings in other locations

(In addition to parallel meetings, in order to increase awareness and involve a broad range of constituents who may not be able to participate at the Paris Conference in person, as well as to provide substantive contributions to the preparatory process of the Conference, preliminary events, hosted by diverse institutions could be organized.)

Planning Committee structure

The planning committee for the 61st Annual DPI/NGO Conference will have branches in New York, Paris, and Geneva, as well as Focal Points in Latin America, Asia, Africa, and Eastern Europe.

Efforts should be made to invite civil society inputs from other regions via video-conference, electronic forums, perhaps with assistance of UNICs and other UN HDQ.

The planning committee will comprise various subcommittees. All members of the planning committee should serve on a subcommittee.

Each subcommittee will have a facilitator in each location.

NGO representatives can serve on one sub-committee only and are asked to assess their ability to commit the necessary time and identify which subcommittee is of greatest interest to them, and which they could best contribute to.

Structure of New York based planning committee

Meetings among the New York based facilitators of the various subcommittees should be held twice monthly to review progress made.

A meeting among all New York based planning committee members can be held once a month.

Facilitators will determine the frequency and format of their respective subcommittee meetings, in consultation with the members of their subcommittee.

New York based NGO representatives are requested to send an e-mail to **DPINGO61@yahoo.com** by 21 January, specifying which sub-committee they are most interested to participate in, as well as their second choice, and describing in no more than fifty words why they have chosen this sub-committee.

(The meeting schedule of the Paris and Geneva planning committee branches should be determined by the end of January.)

Planning committee subcommittees

Outreach committee:

This committee should investigate who / what areas of the world should be represented at the Conference, who are we not reaching?

Identifying key constituencies globally that should be represented at the Conference; {For example, Silenced voices; groups with no voice (extreme poverty; excluded minorities); communities from conflict areas such as Kashmir, Darfur, Palestine, Israel, Myanmar; Dalit; Roma; Indigenous persons; family of victims of forced disappearance; persons with disabilities; persons who have survived trafficking, forced labor; persons living with HIV/AIDS; migrant workers; slum dwellers; innercity dwellers in developed and developing world; women from areas of conflict and post-conflict...}

Researching which NGOs work with those constituencies and can facilitate their input into the planning process;

Asking those organizations to fund one or two representatives from those communities to come to the Conference;

Keeping track of which groups have been outreached to and ensuring that they are kept up to date with relevant developments

Thematic Development and Speaker sub-committee:

Develop sub themes of conference, writing description of panels and round tables, and soliciting input from experts in the topic at hand;

Pair nominated speakers with relevant round table;

Help compile nominations of speakers, ensuring complete information, and verifying speaker availability

Research Communications and Website committee:

Develop Conference website, post information on the Conference, research other relevant data, documentation, links that should be on the website;

Develop and monitor conference blog and other IT based communications and interactions

Midday workshops committee:

This committee will review requests to sponsor midday workshops, help to avoid overlap and ensure a diverse and substantive set of workshops.

In addition to workshops at the Conference in Paris, parallel workshops could be held at other UN Headquarters worldwide

Multigenerational committee:

Foster multigenerational interactions around human rights issues

Identify and mentor youth participants

Coordinate activities during conference

Media and publicitycommittee:

Identify media and public relations opportunities

Assist in liaiding with mainstream or alternative media with interest in human rights

Produce daily newsletter of conference

Help organize interviews

Specific requests/needs committee:

Identify and help attend to speakers and participants with special interpretation or other needs;

Assist in orientation and networking for speakers and participants who are unfamiliar with UN and NGO fora

Events committee:

Help coordinate proposals and logistics for Conference side-events including receptions, performances etc.

Provide information on all side-events being held at the Conference

Travel and accommodation:

Help make available lists of hotels within affordable range;

Work with DPI to verify that speakers are arriving / departing within reasonable time

Trouble shooting committee:

Field questions from NGO representatives

Summarize complaints

Bring to attention of planning committee co-chairs

Fundraising:

All planning committee members who can assist in identifying sponsors should communicate with the designated point person for fundraising in the NGO/DPI Executive Committee, to be announced shortly.

Timeline

The outreach, thematic/speaker, and research/website subcommittees should begin their work by the end of January. * The Conference title should be determined, and prominent speakers should be informally invited by beginning February to assess their availability.