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THE DEPUTY SECRETARY-GENERAL

**ADDRESS TO 55TH ANNUAL DPI/NGO CONFERENCE
(CONFERENCE THEME: "REBUILDING SOCIETIES
EMERGING FROM CONFLICT:
A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY)
New York, 9 September 2002**

**Mr. President, [of the General Assembly]
Shashi,
NGO colleagues and friends,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

*** It is a great pleasure to welcome you all to United Nations
Headquarters.**

*** The theme of this year's conference is one to which the United
Nations attaches the greatest importance. All too often, countries
consumed by conflict have had to struggle to attract long-term
attention and assistance once hostilities end, a peace agreement is
signed, and the press moves on to the next crisis. But this may be
changing. Increasingly, the crucial nature of the post-conflict period
is being recognized.**

*** The United Nations, Governments and NGOs are all becoming more deeply involved in helping countries to recover from their trauma and address the underlying reasons for the descent into violence. From Afghanistan to East Timor, the United Nations and the NGO community have forged a wide range of indispensable partnerships.**

*** I want to talk to you today not so much about your specific theme – since you will be hearing about those challenges from men and women who are working on the ground in many of the world’s crisis zones. Instead, I want to say something about the Secretary-General’s efforts to strengthen the United Nations. Why? Because the UN-NGO relationship figures prominently in that effort. And because post-conflict settings are one of main crucibles for the United Nations: proving grounds where our contact with people in need is closest, and where our achievements – or our failures – are most plain. Only if we succeed in the daily test of self-improvement will we be able to do our part in rebuilding countries.**

*** As you know, the Secretary-General came into office pledging to modernize the United Nations so that it can better meet the needs and aspirations of the world's people. Much has been achieved.**

*** The disparate parts of the UN family now work much better together. We are implementing a far-reaching set of recommendations for improving all aspects of peace operations put forward by an expert panel led by Lakhdar Brahimi, who will address you later this morning.**

*** We have streamlined the bureaucracy and seized the opportunities offered by the Internet. We have undertaken a major overhaul in the management of our human resources. And we have reached out as never before to new partners – foundations, parliamentarians, the private sector and, of course, NGOs -- about which I will have more to say in a moment.**

*** Still, we would be the first to acknowledge that despite these gains, this is a work in progress, and there remains ample room to do more. In the weeks ahead, the Secretary-General will present to the membership a report setting out his vision for further strengthening the United Nations, deepening and building on what has already been accomplished. Without stealing the Secretary-General's thunder, today I would like to share with you some of the ideas that have underpinned his analysis and the recommendations he will make – including in areas of special interest to the NGO community.**

*** This new reform exercise aims to align the Organization's work more closely with the priorities set out in the Millennium Declaration and other major policy frameworks, most notably those adopted at UN conferences. It seeks to respond to the fact that many issues – from the impact of globalization on developing countries to the fight against terrorism – require increased attention. We also face the perpetual challenge of finding ways to better serve the Member States, particularly in the area of economic and social development. This is particularly true when it comes to coordination in the field – as I'm sure those of you with direct experience can attest.**

*** The report also stresses the need for the United Nations to cultivate the best possible partnerships with non-state actors – the non-governmental organizations, foundations, academic institutions, private corporations, parliamentarians, creative individuals and others that are all playing increasingly dynamic and influential roles both in the international arena and in their home communities. Member States, for their part, recognized as much in the Millennium Declaration, and committed themselves to “give greater opportunities” to these diverse forces to contribute to the realization of the UN’s goals and programmes.**

*** NGOs occupy a unique place in this constellation. For many decades, you have been our partner on the ground: delivering humanitarian assistance in places struck by conflict or natural disaster, and in quieter places, helping people who are striving to build stable communities and effective institutions. Today this extraordinarily fruitful cooperation is closer than ever.**

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*** The involvement of NGOs in the inter-governmental processes also dates from the Organization's earliest days, but the intensity of this engagement has grown tremendously in the past 15 years or so, roughly in tandem with the world conferences. NGO contributions have enriched and influenced the official proceedings. And the interaction between NGOs and delegations has taken many forms, from participation in informal panel discussions to testimony before the Security Council under the "Arria formula" and statements to plenary sessions of the General Assembly**

*** This relationship has been enormously rewarding for the United Nation and, I hope, NGOs too. Much good has come from these contacts. At the same time, I think we all sense that this dramatic evolution has brought some real challenges to the fore.**

*** One stems from the sheer number of NGOs seeking to participate in the work of the United Nations. It has grown exponentially in the past decade. And put simply, there is only so much space in the building, in New York and elsewhere. Given these physical limits, it is not feasible for the UN to accommodate all the NGOs who want to participate in conferences and other meetings.**

*** The accreditation process has also become more complex. Over time, different rules and processes have been put in place, from conference to conference, event to event. This has meant that NGOs have encountered uneven standards and, at times, confusing procedures.**

*** NGOs often end up feeling that that involvement is not meaningful enough, and that Governments give them only token roles. For their part, Governments are often frustrated by the constant pressure to make more room for NGOs in their deliberations.**

*** I think you will agree that it may well be time to take stock: to look closely at the UN's interaction with civil society, determine what is working well and what isn't, and then build on all that has been achieved so far to prepare for a future in which the NGO community looks certain to continue its extraordinary contribution to the UN's work.**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

*** Whether helping to rebuild societies emerging from conflict, or addressing the other issues on its agenda, the United Nations could not hope to achieve its goals without the efforts and expertise of NGOs. But from that statement of fact and appreciation flows some very complex challenges. I look forward to continuing this important discussion about the future direction of the United Nations, the NGO community and the partnership between us.**

Thank you very much.