

WELCOME SPEECH FOR 2004 CONFERENCE

Joan Levy, Chair, NGO/DPI Executive Committee

General Assembly Hall 8 September 2004

Thank you Mr. Under Secretary-General for those kind words. Good morning everyone. Once again, on behalf of the NGO/DPI Executive Committee, I am delighted to welcome you to the 57th Annual DPI/NGO Conference, “Millennium Development Goals: Civil Society Takes Action.”

The year has passed so quickly! It seems like yesterday that I stood before you to report on the activities of the Executive Committee and what we hoped to accomplish in the coming year. We continue to live in turbulent times. Newspapers, radio, and television provide us with news of human devastation on a daily basis. At the United Nations, an Institution we all support so strongly, Non Governmental Organizations collaborate with Governments, the Secretariat and members of Civil Society to advance worthwhile causes. There are none as important as the eight Millennium Development Goals set forth by the General Assembly in 2000. The need to achieve these goals is vital; therefore, they have been chosen as

this year's theme. As the Secretary-General said this morning, "the Goals are a test for all of us."

The NGO/DPI Executive Committee represents 1500 Non Governmental Organizations who are affiliated with the Department of Public Information and located in all parts of the world. This Conference provides the best opportunity for us to meet. We are very pleased that so many of you are here this week. As the Committee's Chairman, let me tell you what we have done this past year and what we hope to accomplish in the coming year.

Our major project, as always, is the Annual Conference, in which the Executive Committee partners with the Department of Public Information. This year, there is more participation than ever by NGOs who will be able to express their ideas directly through expanded networking sessions, direct statements and questions at the public hearing on Friday, and 30 NGO Midday Workshops. Last year, we introduced a new interactive website that enabled those interested NGOs and others who could not attend the Conference in person but had access to the Internet, to directly participate in the plenary sessions of the Conference.

This year, our outreach efforts have been greatly expanded. The interactive website is being broadcast in English, French and Spanish and the Millennium Development Goals are presented in all six of the United Nations official languages. Through the website, we are reaching many, many interested parties who are participating in this Conference, so welcome to our virtual audience as well. My colleagues on the Executive Committee thank the Department of Public Information, the Interactive Media Committee, and the Art Center College of Design for making this outreach project possible.

The Executive Committee and the DPI organized three Communication Workshops this year designed to help NGOs improve their communications outreach. The first one, entitled, “UN and Civil Society” focused on different channels of communication between these two partners as it relates to the work of the Panel of Eminent Persons on UN-Civil Society Relations. This Panel, which was established by the Secretary-General, has recommended ways to strengthen Civil Society Partnerships with the UN.

The second Workshop, entitled “Defending the United Nations: What

Every NGO Should Know” presented prominent United Nations officials and leaders in academia and private industry who gave NGOs important ideas on how to forcefully publicize and defend the work of the UN and deal with its well-intentioned and not so well intentioned critics.

The third Workshop featured the Executive Committee, whose members explained the workings of the sub-committees, the Resource Centre, the newsletter and website to many NGOs who were not familiar with the Executive Committee’s work at Headquarters. It also called for more NGOs to directly participate by involving themselves on sub-committees so that they might become more active and knowledgeable about the UN and perhaps become interested in joining the Executive Committee at some future point.

Our quarterly newsletter, the NGO Reporter, has been redesigned in appearance and content by our new co-editors. The first edition under the new management can be found in the monthly mailing, on the web, and in the Resource Centre. It will continue to feature articles and interviews by and for NGOs. I also want to encourage you all to visit our new, improved website.

Our new Executive Committee Brochure, is in your Conference kit and tells about the Committee's origins, missions, and future outreach projects.

We are establishing a Youth sub-committee this year to emphasize the importance of intergenerational partnerships.

This brings me to two topics of utmost importance to NGOs and other members of Civil society. These are the future of the Millennium Development Goals and the report of the Eminent Persons Panel on UN-Civil Society Relations. In September 2005, the General Assembly will undertake a Millennium Summit + 5 review. Civil Society has a unique opportunity to provide input into these upcoming proceedings. A group of NGOs, including representatives from the Executive Committee, the Conference of NGOs (CONGO), World Federation of United Nations (WFUNA) and other national and international organizations have been meeting on a regular basis to discuss ways in which NGOs can make a meaningful contribution to Millennium + 5. Some of the suggestions being considered include participation in meetings already on the calendar for next year, a public hearing with multi-stake holders (as suggested in the Eminent Persons report) and an NGO event in September 2005 at the

time of the Millennium Summit + 5 discussion. These meetings are ongoing and we encourage ideas and suggestions from you.

Second, I want to bring you up to date on what is probably the most important issue for the future of NGOs, the Report of the Panel of Eminent Persons on UN-Civil Society Relationships. The Secretary-General appointed this Panel in 2003 in order to “review the relationship between the United Nations and civil society and offer practical recommendations for improved modalities of interaction.” The former President of Brazil, Fernando Enrique Cardozo, was appointed as Chair, and an eclectic group of 12 panelists from different regions of the world was selected to work with him. It certainly was an exhaustive year for these dedicated men and women, who embarked on a series of worldwide consultations with NGO and civil society groups in order to learn about their concerns. The NGO/DPI Executive Committee was one of the groups consulted, along with over 58 other groups, as well as some member states. In June, 2004, the Panel presented their report to the Secretary-General and as you heard this morning, he in turn is preparing his response.

Members of the Panel have been very generous in holding meetings with

NGOs alone and NGOs along with Governments and the Secretariat to answer questions and respond to comments. NGOs have been and will continue to hold their own meetings and decide how to respond to the changes that have been advocated by the Panel. It is indeed a complicated process and one that makes all multi-stake holders and actors rethink the processes that they have been following for many years.

This has been a busy year for all of us. This Conference, dedicated to discussing and advancing the Millenium Development Goals, promises to be really challenging. Please come to the Thursday morning meeting that the Executive Committee holds each year and join us for a discussion on all these topics. I wish you an “action packed” three days and hope you will leave invigorated, full of new ideas, and ready to take action!

Thank you for your attention.

