

OPENING MESSAGE FOR THE NGO/DPI CONFERENCE JOAN KIRBY

Good morning and welcome to 2,500 NGOs from 90 countries. It was 4 years ago on this very day, Sept. 8, 2000, in this very room, that 189 member states recognized that, in addition to separate responsibilities to their individual societies, they have “a **collective responsibility** to uphold the principles of **human dignity, equality and equity at the global level**”. As leaders, they “acknowledged their duty to all the world’s people, especially the most vulnerable, and in particular, the children of the world, to whom the future belongs”.

They solemnly reaffirmed, that the United Nations is the indispensable common house of the entire human family, and they pledged to seek to realize their universal aspiration for peace, cooperation and development. They pledged unstinting support for their common objectives and their determination to achieve them. Time bound Millennium Development goals (MDGs) were to be the means to measure achievement.

An empty promise? An unrealistic aspiration? We hope not!

Last November at the Town Meeting where we discussed proposals for the this year’s DPI/NGO Conference, NGOs from around the world resolved to uphold the millennium declaration and to do our part to achieve the Millennium Development Goals – in other words, we acknowledged **our duty as civil society** “to [improve human conditions for] all the world’s people, especially the most vulnerable, and in particular, the children of the world, to whom the future belongs”.

Having adopted the MDGs as the focus of the conference, four years after the Millennium Declaration, we have found that the MDGs are little known beyond this “common house of the human family”, the General Assembly Hall. We, as NGOs committed to communicate our work in partnership with United Nations, seek to

raise public awareness of the significance and opportunities of the MDGs. WE also want to highlight the findings of the **Cardoso Report on the relationship of Civil Society and the UN**. The report reminds us that no one constituency makes change happen in the world: not the Member States alone, not the international Financial Institutions, not the Media, not UN Agencies, not the NGOs alone. The Cardoso Report tells us, and we should not disregard the message, that change comes when MULTI Constituencies work together.

Our primary purpose then at this Conference is to **get the word out** about the Goals in order to **bring all the constituencies into collaboration**. We want to bring together these worldwide efforts to a common awareness. This is not just a local effort. It is a **worldwide millennium effort** to improve conditions for all of humanity.

Today, we are gathered to measure the achievement made toward the MDGs, and to recommit ourselves to their achievement.

What has been done and what is being done to achieve: the eradication of poverty and hunger, universal primary education, improvement of health facilities for women and children, an end to the HIV/AIDS pandemic, to ensure environmental sustainability and to develop fair and sustainable trade?

In the coming days, experts from Member States, UN Agencies, the World Bank, and from NGOs

- will share their progress on the achievement of the goals.
- will name the obstacles that obstruct progress toward these humanitarian goals. We all know that war and its consequences greatly obstruct the accomplishment of the MDGs.
- will look at differing roles of civil society from the perspectives of North/South Partnerships (industrialized and developing societies); of particular interest is the role of the

- international community in solving global development problems such as trade, debt relief and cooperation.
- will help to increase and sustain the political will needed to achieve the goals (especially through the media and our interactive website).
 - And, in Panel 5 on Friday, through the leadership of the Networking and Midday Workshop Committees, the NGO community gathered here will commend, recommend, challenge and report what they see as progress. NGO representatives will make recommendations that can be tracked through the year in preparation for the Millennium + 5 Summit meeting in 2005. You will recognize innovative initiatives designed to raise the voice of NGOs.
 - Finally, thanks to our networking and informal dialogues, we will form active partnerships to take the message back home beyond the UN family to all parts of the world.

The purpose of this conference is to ensure that the goals are on the mind of every policymaker, media representative and global citizen and to see that no one can claim ignorance of our common duty to work actively towards the achievement of these eight goals.

This is a formidable task we have assumed.

It is possible only because a dedicated Planning Committee of more than fifty NGO representatives who care deeply about these humanitarian aspirations have persevered in meeting for eight months to prepare this conference;

it is possible because eight hard-working committees (Media, Midday NGO Workshops, Youth, Interactive Media, Reception, Registration and Networking) have contributed their time and talent to ensure that it will be a success. I salute the Planning Committee for its dedication in organizing this remarkable gathering.

Extraordinary, professional and committed collaboration with Paul Hoeffel and his wonderful staff has been a rare privilege,

and the support, financial and moral, of the Executive Committee Chair, Joan Levy, and each member of the DPI/NGO Executive Committee has guided many decisions to make sure your days here are enjoyable as well as fruitful. My best experience in co-chairing the committee with Paul Hoeffel, a fact that few people are aware of, is realizing how many people are involved in making this conference work – it has been my great pleasure to collaborate with them.

But our work is certainly not finished. In the coming year the DPI/NGO community and CONGO will be preparing for the Millennium plus Five. The NGO portion of the multi-stakeholders will highlight the MDGs during 2005, the 5th year out, and together and collectively, we will continue to press officials at all levels to heighten their commitment and resolve, as we are doing at this conference, to ensure that the Millennium Development Goals are achieved, fulfilling our “collective responsibility to uphold the principles of human dignity, equality and equity at a global level”..

A Buddhist prayer says it this way:

For as long as space endures, for as long as living beings remain, may we too abide to relieve the misery of the world. May this Conference make its contribution to the achievement of the humanitarian aspirations of the MDGs.

Thank you for coming to this conference and thank you in advance for your serious participation.