

61st Annual DPI/NGO Conference

Minutes of the NGO Planning Committee meeting

Conference Room 7, Wednesday 12th March 2008, 10.00 a.m. - 1.00 p.m.

1. Welcome & Introduction

Shamina de Gonzaga, Chair of the 61st Annual DPI/NGO Conference, and Co-Chair of the Planning Committee, welcomed the NGO representatives to the NGO Planning Committee meeting and reviewed the status of the planning process:

- With less than 6 months remaining for the organization of the conference, she recalled the initial premise of building on the opportunity of the conference being held outside of New York for the first time, to render the planning process as inclusive and participatory as possible, and in particular to involve the input of constituencies on the ground that are confronting human rights issues. While there had been a broad agreement on these principles in theory, in practice it was necessary to re-commit to this effort, especially in view of the pending deadlines.
- On the structure of the conference, she presented an overview of the recommended format to render the conference more participatory and develop a process for identifying outcomes, through the structure of the roundtables and break-out sessions, caucuses, midday workshops, and reporting back session. Details on the structure will be listed in the Second Information Bulletin.

Recommendations:

- The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights would be asked to staff a Technical Assistance / Support Centre that would be available throughout the conference to provide information to participants on matters pertaining to civil society access and engagement with human rights mechanisms;
- A separate Resource Centre for NGOs to use computers and access basic documents on the conference and other related material was already provided for in the budget.

2. Budget and host-country agreement

- Juan-Carlos Brandt reported on the meeting held between the Under-Secretary-General and the Permanent Representative of France and noted that the French government was expected to respond positively to the proposed budget. A host-country agreement, which would specify the division of responsibilities among the UN, the French government, and the NGO community, was being developed. More information was expected shortly.

3. Title

21 February was the deadline to receive submissions for the conference title. Approximately 25 proposals were sent by NGOs, of which five in French. The Chair of the NGO/DPI Executive Committee and the Co-chairs of the Planning Committee had met to discuss the short list of preferred titles from among the submissions. These were:

- "60^{ème} anniversaire de la DUDH: bilan, perspectives et débats"
- "La DUDH : 60 ans après, faire de l'espoir d'universalité une réalité"
- "Human rights and responsibilities in a world without boundaries."

These were discussed at a meeting with the Director of the Outreach Division, who had also proposed a title "Righting Human Wrongs: The UDHR at 60." As a compromise, it was decided that the title of the Conference would be "Reaffirming Human Rights: The Universal Declaration at 60." This seemed to be a reasonable compromise. It should be rendered more attractive by the visual identity, which is in the process of being developed.

4. Visual identity

Danila Boneva, the representative of OHCHR recalled that the visual identity that the OHCHR developed for the 60th anniversary of the UDHR could be used for the Conference.

Mr. Brandt noted that the OHCHR logo had been sent to the section of DPI that is working on the conference identity for elements of inspiration. A preliminary version was expected for end of March or beginning of April. This would be necessary for the setting up of the official conference website.

5. Second Information Bulletin

The Second Information Bulletin would contain information on the structure of the conference, the provisional agenda, the speaker nomination form, and deadlines for submitting input and speaker nominations. The deadline for submitting input on the themes would be 11 April, the deadline for submitting speaker nominations would be 18 April. The speaker nomination form had been revised, with the help of Sandra Voelker to include fields on the language in which the candidate is fluent, the sector that she/he represents, the quality of speaker's speaking skills, the subject he/she would address, and relevant experience.

Information on registration would be available following a letter to be sent out by the Co-chairs of the Planning Committee.

Recommendation:

- The registration form should ask participants to indicate all UN languages that they understand. This would help to identify interpretation needs, especially for the break-out sessions. Additionally, participants could indicate any other specific needs, including access and accommodations for persons with disabilities.
- The registration form should specify the number of representatives per NGO that can register. In previous years, there was a limit of 5 delegates per NGO. This year the limit may be lower due to space requirements, as well as the fact that in addition to NGOs accredited to DPI and ECOSOC, organizations accredited to UNESCO, to OHCHR, as well as other groups from the grassroots were being invited to attend.

6. Interpretation

The question of interpretation services was raised in the context of the break-out sessions. UNESCO had to be consulted regarding the number of simultaneous break-out sessions that could be accommodated and what services each session would require. Interpretation was being planned for the panels. It remained to be seen if the break-out sessions would be held in different languages, to accommodate the needs of participants from different regions.

Noting that many participants may not be fluent in French nor in English, Joan Levy, Coordinator of the subcommittees, was gathering a list of NGO representatives who could serve as unofficial interpreters. Thus far there were candidates for English, German, and several Asian languages.

7. Reports from the subcommittees

Thematic

Bobbie Nassar and Estelle Perry reported on the tentative outline of the conference programme, namely the five roundtables. This outline was being submitted to the institutional partners, including OHCHR, UNESCO, as well as to NGOs, for input. (The outline can be viewed in the provisional agenda in the Second Information Bulletin.)

Recommendations:

- For the first roundtable in particular, which focuses on human rights mechanisms, information should be provided to the participants in advance, so that the Conference can focus on application and facilitate informed discussions.
- "Culture of peace" was recommended for thematic inclusion in one of the roundtables.
- It was mentioned that the Conference should acknowledge the work of organizations that may not define themselves as human rights organizations but that contribute to ensuring access to basic human rights, such as health and education.
- In all thematic areas, there should be examples of practical successes.
- A template should be developed for the structure of the break-out sessions.
- The OHCHR welcomed the fact that the Conference is addressing not only civil and political, but also economic, social, and cultural rights, and offered their website for further background information on the human rights system (www.ohchr.org).
- UNESCO expressed interest to focus on issues related to Article 19 of the UDHR.

Outreach

- The Co-chairs of the Outreach subcommittee had been excused from the meeting due to travel and conflicting engagements. Eva Sandis, member of the subcommittee, reported on their activities, noting that their meeting was to be held following the Planning Committee meeting.
- A letter was being sent to organizations to identify groups on the ground should provide input on the themes as well as participate in the Conference.

Recommendations:

- The regional representatives of the Executive Committee could be asked to communicate with their networks.
- Frank Plantan, the representative of the University of Pennsylvania, mentioned that his international consortium could help contribute academic expertise.
- The Outreach subcommittee should have technical support.

Midday workshops

A meeting between the Midday Workshop subcommittee Co-chairs and the Co-chairs of the Planning Committee had been held. It was proposed that the Conference have up to 15 midday workshops per day. In addition to New York Subcommittee Co-chairs, counterparts in Paris (Comité de liaison auprès de l'UNESCO) and Geneva (CONGO) could assist to receive and review submissions of proposals from different regions. Efforts should be made to enable organizations based in all regions to lead workshops at the conference in Paris. The subcommittee will not be responsible for organizing workshops held outside of Paris.

Recommendations:

- The letter from the Planning Committee Co-chairs, inviting NGOs to register, should be sent out before the letter inviting NGOs to submit workshop proposals is circulated.
- There should be a communication between the counterparts in New York, Paris, Geneva, and the timeline should be developed working backwards from the date of the Conference.
- NGOs will be encouraged to identify partner organizations to co-sponsor workshops. If necessary, the subcommittee will recommend such partnerships.

Media

The Media subcommittee Co-chairs were developing a media kit and noted that there was interest from media groups based abroad. They were looking forward to any guidelines that they would have to follow, based on previous years' experience.

Research/ communications/ website

The timeline for the official UN conference website was depending on the availability of the visual identity. It was expected that by mid or end of April, the website would be operational. The NGO framework website would be used in the interim (www.ngo-framework.net). Subcommittee Co-chair Bircan Unver presented her proposal for a section of the website that would highlight projects that NGOs have initiated in connection with subjects being addressed at the conference.

Recommendation:

- The official conference website should be in French and in English. The website should include a calendar of events happening at / around the conference.

Multigenerational

The subcommittee, consisting of four older persons and four young people, had met and decided that it would meet on the last Thursday of every month. Among the projects that they discussed were mentoring, tutoring, learning together between grand-parents and grand-children, interviewing and listening to experiences regarding human rights issues, including torture, elder and child abuse, and other matters. Noting that multigenerational relationships exist within every activity and sphere of society, the subcommittee welcomed the inputs of other subcommittees and looked forward to

recommending speakers of various ages and backgrounds for the conference.

Events

Subcommittee Co-chair Michele Peppers reported that a meeting was being scheduled for after the Planning Committee meeting and that they were waiting for feedback about events already being organized in Paris to ascertain what aspects would fall under their responsibility.

Rapporteurs

Skilled rapporteurs would be needed for every Conference session, as their reports would provide the basis for the summaries and action points that would be presented at the closing of the conference and in any outcome papers. A large number of rapporteurs would be needed. In addition to writing skills, an understanding of the substance of the Conference would be required.

Travel

The Fundraising subcommittee of the NGO/DPI Executive Committee had approved the proposal made by the Friendship Ambassadors Foundation. For best rates on hotel and travel, time is of the essence and Planning Committee members were urged to make their reservations in advance. The FAF option would allow NGO reps to stay in the same boutique hotels in the vicinity of the UNESCO. By using that plan, NGO representatives would be contributing to the fundraising efforts of the Executive Committee. The proposed FAF arrangements included air and land for 8, 6, or 4 nights, as well as land-only proposals. For US citizens, this option would enable a tax deduction of 200 USD per person. Details can be found on the website of the NGO DPI Executive Committee, or on the website of the FAF. Elaine Valdov, at FAF could be contacted at tel. 646-703-1974 for further information.

Fundraising

The budget submitted by DPI to the French government is intended to cover only the infrastructural needs of the conference, the cost of which is usually absorbed by holding the Conference at the UN's NY headquarters. That budget would not cover the travel for speakers and other related needs. NGO fundraising efforts to support the participation of speakers from developing countries, as well as facilitate the participation of NGO reps from the grassroots, and to sponsor events, were ongoing. A proposal had been submitted to the Human Security Trust Fund of the UN which, if received, would possibly support up to thirty representatives from the grassroots. The governments of France and Spain had also expressed interest to help facilitate the participation of NGO representatives from the developing world.

Deadlines and process

- 11 April is the deadline for providing input of themes of the roundtables.
- 18 April is the deadline for submitting speaker nominations.
- This information, as well as the addresses to which such input should be sent, will be provided in the Second Information Bulletin, to be circulated by DPI and which should be shared with all other relevant partner institutions and NGOs.
- Concern was expressed that not all input received would be reflected in the final programme. It was recalled that the goal was to understand what the priority issues of the participants may be, so that the Conference can take into account these perspectives.

8. Next Planning Committee meeting

The next meeting of Planning Committee Co-chairs is scheduled for 28 March, from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m., at the UNESCO offices, DC-2, ninth floor conference room.