

61st Annual DPI/NGO Conference
Minutes of the 2nd meeting of the planning committee
31 January 2008, 2 – 5 p.m. Conference Room 3

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 2nd planning committee meeting. She mentioned that useful consultations had been conducted in the past month, which would be shared later in the meeting, and introduced Mr. Ramu Damodaran, Chief of the Civil Society Service, Department of Public Information.

Mr. Damodaran thanked Ms. de Gonzaga for her introduction and acknowledged guests at the meeting including representatives of UNESCO, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the French Permanent Mission to the UN, the Slovenian Permanent Mission to the UN, Kyung Hee University of Seoul.

He mentioned that the Conference should be monitored by NGOs worldwide and that it should build on the success of the 60th Annual DPI/NGO Conference held last year. He noted the unprecedented characteristic of the 2008 conference, with regard to the location, and the new partners, including the Government of France, UNESCO, and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. He mentioned the sensitivities surrounding a NGO conference on human rights and recalled that the DPI/NGO conference in 1995 was also focused on human rights. Alluding to conference fatigue, he urged NGO representatives to make memorable contributions. He also thanked the DPI NGO section for their efforts to produce a budget.

2. Report on 2nd mission to Paris and Geneva

Ms. de Gonzaga reported on her second mission to Paris (venue of the Conference) and Geneva (UNOHCHR and many HR NGOs).

The purpose of the mission was to engage in substantive consultations with NGO and other partners, in order to receive input on the thematic development of the Conference and identify areas of collaboration.

Emphasizing the importance of using the Conference as a platform to further empower and strengthen civil society contributions to the promotion and protection of human rights, Ms. De Gonzaga made an appeal to NGOs to tap into existing resources and networks with a view to maximizing outreach and inclusiveness, in order to address questions that are relevant to constituents on ground and involve them in the Conference.

Among the potential partners consulted were:

NGOs:

- Fédération Internationale des Droits de l'Homme
- Commission Nationale Consultative des Droits d'Homme
- ATD Quart Monde
- UNESCO NGO Liaison Committee
- Human Dignity and Human Rights Caucus
- 3HO Foundation (Healthy, Happy, Holy Organisation)
- Lutheran World Federation
- CIVICUS
- CONGO
- Anglican Consultative Council, NGO Committee on Spirituality, Values and Global Concerns
- Soka Gakkai International, NGO Special Committee on Human Rights Working Group on Human Rights Education and Learning

- The Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues (SPSSI), International Association of Gerontology and Geriatrics (IAGG), NGO Committee on Ageing, Geneva
- Spanish Society for the Advancement of International Human Rights Law
- International Federation of University Women (IFUW), NGO CSW Working Group on Women in Employment and Economic Development (WGWEED) World Union of Catholic Women's Organisations
- Mouvement Mondial des Mères (MMM)
- NGO CSW Working Group on the Girl Child
- Baha'i International Community
- Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University, NGO CSW Working Group Femmes pour Le Monde
- Federation of American Women's Clubs Overseas (FAWCO), Task Force "Celebrating Eleanor Roosevelt"
- International Council of Women (ICW) and the Fédération Européenne des Femmes Actives au Foyer (FEFAF)
- International Centre for Health, Migration and Development, NGO CSW Working Group on Refugees and Migration

Academia:

- Advancia—French business school, member of the Chamber of Commerce of Paris, to explore entrepreneurship as a vehicle for enhancing NGO activities, and to foster corporate social responsibility and understanding of human rights among young entrepreneurs;
- ESCP EAP— French business school, member of the Chamber of Commerce of Paris and of the UN Global Compact, to explore involvement of students in seeking support for Conference related activities;
- Initiadroit—programme that teaches international law and human rights to middle school and high school students throughout France, to explore partnership in the context of promoting HR education

United Nations:

- UNESCO – NGO Section
- UNOHCHR – Civil Society Service
- ILO – Communications
- UNAIDS – Civil Society Service

Other contacts and consultations:

- City of Paris – Office of the Mayor of Paris; Mayor of the Fifth Arrondissement: In order to engage the broader public in the commemoration of the UDHR, public space would be sought for exhibits, ceremonies, a Human Rights Village; to that end, contacts were being pursued with the Office of the Mayor of Paris and with other responsible authorities for public spaces in various key sites throughout Paris.
- Graduate Institute of International Studies, Mr. Andrew Clapham
- Former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mr. Bertrand Ramcharan
- Expert on media in the Arab world, Mr. Issa Makhoul
- Expert on civil society in the Arab world, Mr. Salam Kawakibi

Focal points and Advisers

To facilitate expert input on specific issues, ensure outreach to diverse regions, and maintain communications with partners in various locations throughout the planning process, the Conference Chair would nominate advisers and focal points. The list of advisers and focal points will be announced in the second information bulletin.

3. Report on status of logistical arrangements for the Conference

Juan Carlos, Chief of the NGO section of the Department of Public Information, and Co-Chair of the Planning Committee, updated on the progress of Conference arrangements, stating that the

location of the Conference was 85% definite, that his Section was working to develop a budget, but was still waiting on some information, and that efforts were being made to engage in new partnerships to strengthen the UN's mission.

4. Report on status of New York based subcommittees

Ms. de Gonzaga invited Ms. Joan Levy, who had received and coordinated applications to update on the status of the subcommittees

Joan Levy informed that over 100 applications for subcommittee participation had been received and that more were still being submitted.

The three sub-committees that had to meet pressing deadlines were the Outreach, Thematic and Communications/Website subcommittees.

The New York based co-facilitators would be Sister Joan Kirby (Temple of Understanding) and Jean Stallings/ Vicky Soanes (ATD Fourth World Movement) for the Outreach Committee; Bobbi Nassar (NGO Committee on Human Rights) and Estelle Perry (Center for UN Reform) for the Thematic Committee, and Robert Pollard (NGO Committee on Education) and Bircan Unver (Light Millennium) for the Communications/Website Committee.

A spreadsheet of contact information of all facilitators would soon be available; Ms. Levy will remain the contact person for matters concerning the subcommittees.

Ms. de Gonzaga thanked Ms. Levy and reviewed the immediate tasks of the three subcommittees that had been mentioned:

Outreach Committee

- Identify constituencies worldwide whose human rights are being threatened and whose perspectives and ideas should inform the Conference
- Identify and reach out to organizations that can serve as a bridge to such constituencies and other groups on the ground that may be outside the formal networks of UN NGOs, and provide a means for them to express their views and, if possible, participate in person at the Conference

Thematic Committee

Based on input received from consultations there appear to be certain issues that are echoed by many, as well as cross-cutting perspectives:

- Among the issues highlighted by many, were human rights education; how the media represents human rights issues (the need to involve members of media not just as moderators of conference panels, or reporters to cover the conference, but also to engage reporters and media executives in the actual discussions); justice, the rule of law, and what justice signifies for victims (does the conviction of a human rights offender constitute justice for victims who may still be without access to care, education etc.); the relationship between human security and human rights; other perspectives of interest included the concept of human rights in a world without borders (looking at human rights and institutional mechanisms in the context of shifting boundaries of national sovereignty, and in light of global issues such as climate change, migration, trafficking, and new technologies).

- Among the cross-cutting perspectives, the focus on empowering civil society to better access information and engage effectively in the protection and promotion of human rights, as well as the universality and indivisibility of human rights, were emphasized as elements that should be central in all thematic areas.

-Communications/Website Committee

As powerful tool to disseminate information, and to enable interaction, the Conference website should utilize blogs, reference current events, and make use of other elements to make the Conference more participatory, recalling that last year's conference website got over 800,000 hits.

Mr. Brandt mentioned the need for efficiency, and that those who are not up to speed with technological advances miss out on a new way of thinking. New networking possibilities include MySpace, Wikipedia and the concept of a “sandbox”. He introduced Sasa Gorisek from the NGO Section.

Ms. Gorisek referenced discussions in the previous planning committee meeting about utilizing social networking sites like YouTube and Facebook and spoke about creating a virtual resource center in addition to the online website. She mentioned that the technological development would require participation from NGOs, including in terms of financial resources.

5. Open discussion

Ms. de Gonzaga opened the floor for questions and comments.

Interventions were made by Narelle Townsend, Cora Weiss, Jerry Speevack, Michaela Walsh, Estelle Perry, Robert Pollard, Bircan Unver, Bill Gellerman, Noema Chaplin, Janet Stovin, Shulamith Koenig, Joan Kirby, Aaron Etra, student from NYU.

Recommendations from the floor:

- recognizing that human rights are intergenerational, the possibility of working with schools in France and locally should be explored further, taking the meetings of the subcommittees to universities, in order to enable students to participate;
- referencing the lack of people under 25 years at the planning committee and the fact that in many countries the majority of the population is youth, involving more young people, not only as interns, but as partners in the planning process was highlighted;
- civil society is an unarmed superpower, 8 years ago, 10,000 people gathered together to declare peace as a human right, in that regard, the conference must discuss the interconnectedness of human rights and peace, NGOs do make important contributions and have been responsible for bringing many issues to the UN's agenda;
- the conference should explore changes to its format, in order to be more participatory, allowing civil society to work together to develop concrete proposals that can go down in history;
- it would be useful to reflect on the status of human rights 10 years ago, and the status of HR today and to clarify to youth their role in the human rights agenda;
- conversations taking place in different places could be connected via video link during the conference;
- flipvideo.com, a website which is giving free handheld devices that record up to 2 hours of material, could be used ;
- NGOframework.net/DPINGO61, a working website that includes key human rights documents going back 60 years was put forward as a resource developed by the co-facilitator for the communications/website subcommittee; tiddlywiki, which allows anyone to download the entire website and customize it, was recommended;
- If the structure of the conference is changed, Thematic sub-comm members need to be informed in order to meet the deadlines;
- facilities should be available in the evening during the Conference, so the NGOs attending are able to engage in caucusing, or working groups;
- meetings could be held at universities or in hotels with large conference rooms;
- the conference could be designed so that every committee achieves an outcome, and approaches its work with a long term perspective, reaching beyond the Conference itself;
- an Outcomes sub-committee could be formed; if outcomes are planned before attending the actual conference, then the Conference can be more action-oriented;
- to engage youth, information needs to be concise and should include specific action items;
- the conference should help develop a new political culture based on human rights, and work to spread a holistic vision of human rights, understanding human rights as a way of life;
- the vocabulary of the conference, could shift from HR violations to human rights realization, and the word “learning,” could replace “education”, which evokes a sense of academia and schooling, whereas learning complies with the idea of every human being alive knowing human rights as a way of life - on December 19, the UN declared 2009 as a year of HR learning;

- the Thematic subcommittee could work on an action plan for producing a document setting out powerful messages from civil society worldwide;
- outreach should be linked with outcomes, and everyone who participates should have a voice before outcomes are decided on - graduate students could tabulate information from participants, which would entail a comprehensive research project, and also involve youth in the agenda in a meaningful way;
- the Conference should highlight the relevance of the UDHR in modern society.

Questions:

- How will the New York planning committee involve actors based in other countries?
- could there be a period before each meeting when people are educated about technological developments, so that those who are not digitized will not be marginalized from the planning process?
- could the planning meetings be webcast?
- what is seen as the purpose of the conference? If the conference is successful, what will the world be like?
- conferences in the past have entailed a few people talking to a larger group, but not much action; however, if the conference is focused on human rights, action is required, what actions can be taken?
- could the problem of organ trafficking and illegal transplants be addressed at the conference?
- when will speakers forms be available?
- how would visa issues for participants be addressed?

C. Responses:

- the subcommittee meetings could be held outside of the UN, in universities to engage students;
- students from many schools currently participate in committees as full time members, not only as interns;
- in view of new partners, including the French government, UNESCO and UNOHCHR, it is important that all parties have the opportunity to input to the Conference planning, while remembering that no matter how many institutional partners are involved, it is still a consultative process, in which civil society has an equal voice;
- each subcommittee of the planning committee will be expected to liaise and consult with counterparts abroad to ensure the effective input of all parties in the development of the Conference;
- technological training for small groups would be useful; the Communications/Website subcommittee could work on this;
- webcasting meetings would depend on financial implications;
- human rights realization is a key focus, and in all areas of the Conference, it is important to identify how and where progress is being achieved and how positive efforts can be strengthened;
- the proposal of an outcomes committee could be explored with a view to developing action points that could be undertaken following the Conference;
- efforts should be made to ensure the round tables are more participatory, with fewer presenters and more interaction with participants, the creation of conversation lounges that will prompt off the record discussion with arbiters, should also facilitate more interaction and new formats for the Conference should be envisaged;
- individuals who wish to address specific issues, such as the practice of human organ transplants, should liaise with the thematic committee;
- Mr. Brandt mentioned that the same speaker forms as those used last year could be used this year; and that speakers forms would be ready to distribute the next day. He reminded that the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Louise Arbour, has already accepted to address the Conference as an opening keynote speaker;
- It was subsequently suggested that more detailed information would be needed on the speaker forms and that a revised speaker form be drafted with the help of the thematic subcommittee. Ms. de Gonzaga expressed the wish that the closing key note address should be a strong human rights defender, representing civil society;

- the French government is aware of the visa issues and has expressed its willingness to facilitate visas for speakers and participants;

6. Discussion of timeline

It was noted that deadlines had not been discussed prior to the meeting. Sol Oca from the DPI NGO Section explained that early deadlines were necessary as all materials would be printed in New York City, and then shipped to Paris; therefore DPI must account for this shipping time.

DPI put forth the following deadlines:

15 February: Deadline for title submissions

Once the title is determined, the visual identity of the conference will be considered; title possibilities will be submitted later, perhaps on some website where everyone can make a submission.

15 March: Deadline for articulations, blurbs, themes

Once the content is determined, programs can be created.

31 March: Deadline for nominating proposed speakers

-A list—most wanted speakers

-B list—

7. Remarks and announcements

The Representatives of UNESCO, the Permanent Mission of France, and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, were invited to take the floor. All parties welcomed the collaboration in the context of the Conference. It was also noted that the slogan for the Commemoration of the UDHR is “Dignity and Justice for all of us.”

Jeffery Huffines, chair of the NGO/DPI Executive Committee announced that the NGO reporter was online, and that anyone who did not receive a newsletter should email him. He also recalled the NGO/DPI fundraising appeal which had been circulated in December 2007, noting the deficit in the budget of the NGO/DPI Executive Committee due to expenditures for last year’s Conference, and the fact that the mission to Paris and Geneva in January was only made possible thanks to contributions earmarked for that purpose. NGO representatives were urged to make contributions.

8. Next Planning Committee meeting

The next meeting of the full planning committee would likely be held at the end of February and will be announced by e-mail.

A meeting of facilitators for the subcommittees will be held on Thursday 14 February from 3 to 5, room to be announced.

The meeting was adjourned.