

## **Minutes:**

### **4 January 2008 – Planning Committee meeting: 61<sup>st</sup> Annual DPI/NGO Conference**

#### **1. Welcome and Introduction**

Juan Carlos Brandt, Chief of the NGO Section of the Department of Public Information, and Co-Chair of the Planning Committee, welcomed the NGO representatives to the planning committee meeting and acknowledged DPI interns and staff in attendance.

#### **2. Report from November mission to Paris and Geneva**

Shamina de Gonzaga, Chair of the 61<sup>st</sup> Annual DPI/NGO Conference, and Co-Chair of the Planning Committee, made a brief report on the fact-finding mission to Paris and Geneva:

- Participants in the mission included Sol Oca (Officer in the DPI/NGO Section); Isabelle Broyer (Chief, Guided Tours Unit); Jeffery Huffines (Chair, NGO/DPI Executive Committee); Shamina de Gonzaga (Chair, 61<sup>st</sup> Annual DPI/NGO Conference), and the key collaboration of Jean-Pierre Bugada of the United Nations Regional Information Centre of Brussels.
- The mission included meetings in Paris with the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs; UNESCO; UNESCO's NGO Liaison Committee; the Commission Nationale Consultative des Droits de l'Homme; the International Federation for Human Rights, and meetings in Geneva with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights; the United Nations Office in Geneva; various NGOs brought together for an informal consultation by UNOHCHR; the Lutheran World Federation (also Chair of the NGO Committee on Human Rights).
- Results from the fact-finding mission indicated that all partners were receptive in principle to the 61<sup>st</sup> Annual DPI/NGO Conference; UNESCO Headquarters provides ample space and infrastructure to host the Conference and would allocate all available Conference rooms to the DPI/NGO Conference from 3 to 5 September – however, while the space would be made available free of charge, services including interpretation, security, webcast, support staff etc. would have to be accounted for in the budget of the Conference; the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs also welcomed the possibility of hosting the Conference in Paris and affirmed that the dates of the Conference did not clash with any other events or celebrations in connection with the commemoration of the UDHR, and requested that a budget detailing the various expenses that would have to be met, be presented to them at the earliest; the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights also expressed interest in collaborating with the 61<sup>st</sup> Annual DPI/NGO Conference, with regard to the topics of the meeting and the outreach to Geneva based NGOs that work with the OHCHR; UNOG also expressed willingness to collaborate, notably in the area of press and communications; the various NGO representatives consulted with expressed interest to be kept

informed of the process and gave feedback to the topics and vision for the Conference.

### **3. Background Paper**

Shamina de Gonzaga distributed the Agenda for the meeting, as well as the Information Bulletin that had been previously circulated by e-mail, and a working paper, elaborating the goals of the Conference, as well as setting out a proposal for the structure of the Planning Committee. (The information bulletin and working paper can be viewed at the DPI/NGO section website, as well as on the NGO/DPI Executive Committee website.)

The discussions relating to the elements noted in the working paper included the following points:

#### **A. On content:**

- Achieving consensus on topics might not be possible, however planning committee members would be encouraged to work in a collaborative and creative manner, and aim to identify cross-cutting themes and perspectives, understanding that the scope of the Conference will allow for in depth discussions on a variety of issues;
- It was announced the UN High-Commissioner for Human Rights, Mme Louise Arbour, has confirmed her participation as one of the keynote speakers of the conference;
- Participants should not be passive observers; the modality of the Conference will be interactive, and panels should be organized to enable maximum interactivity, when taking into account the number of speakers per panel and identifying the candidates for moderators and speakers;
- Sharing best practices, successes and challenges that NGOs working on human rights issues have encountered, and focusing on actionable proposals that could enhance civil society's ability to protect and promote human rights, should be at the center of the dialogues, in all thematic aspects that will be addressed.
- The emphasis of the working paper on involving civil society from developing countries and outreaching to constituencies that are often not included in UN Conferences, as well as to mainstream constituents that may not have an immediate interest in human rights issues or an awareness of the UDHR, was welcomed;
- The need to involve the media, not only for dissemination purposes, but also in dialogues about how human rights issues are covered, and to outreach to alternative media, and human rights organizations with a strong communications mechanism was stressed;
- It was recommended that press releases be disseminated at the regional level to promote and increase a diverse attendance at the conference;
- Bringing in the experiences of human rights issues at the local level and encouraging the empowerment of civil society at the grassroots was encouraged;
- A means of raising awareness of the conference would be to make the connection between the human rights issues to be addressed at the Conference and current events taking place worldwide that impact human rights;

- It was suggested that the Conference include a workshop focusing on human rights and the environment;
- The Conference should aim to provide strategies that can be implemented and disseminated after the Conference as follow-up;
- The importance of involving participants in a meaningful and creative way, was stressed, noting that NGOs participating at the conference represent various issues and agendas, and should be able to address sensitive matters of interest in an open and respectful manner;
- Conversation lounges were being proposed as a space for off the record discussions, to facilitate open dialogue and interaction around sensitive issues.
- The use of technology space, such as YouTube for increasing dialogue in connection with the Conference, was recommended;
- The concerns of various constituencies can be reflected in the Conference through the various round tables and workshops;
- The sub-committees will need to identify cross-cutting perspectives and goals that can be applied and harnessed in the context of the diverse discussion topics and settings;
- The need for interpretation and translation is a major concern, affecting both the format and budget of the Conference;
- Involving regional press in the Conference was suggested as one way of ensuring that communication reaches diverse constituencies;
- It was suggested that the UDHR be read aloud at some point during the Conference.

B. On the proposed planning committee structure and working methods:

- The planning committee will have branches in Paris, where UNESCO is Headquartered, and in Geneva, as the seat of OHCHR and the Human Rights Council, and will also include regional focal points;
- Each branch will have facilitators for specific aspects of conference planning. Facilitators should communicate regularly, in accordance with the deadlines at hand;
- The planning committee will comprise various subcommittees;
- NGO representatives can work on one sub-committee only;
- **Monday, 21 January 2008 is the deadline for New York based NGO representatives to request participation on a sub-committee. Requests are to be sent via e-mail to [DPINGO61@yahoo.com](mailto:DPINGO61@yahoo.com) including the reason for interest on the specific sub-committee, as well as a second choice;**
- NGOs that are not associated to DPI, but that work in partnership with UNESCO, the OHCHR or the French government will be involved;
- DPI/NGO section remains responsible for sending letters of invitation, however all partners should be involved in nominating speakers etc;
- The use of technology to find new methods of operation and communication among NGO representatives in diverse locations was encouraged, taking into account the fact that the 61<sup>st</sup> Annual DPI/NGO Conference marks the first time that the Conference is being held outside of the UN's New York HQ.

C. On the sub-committees of the planning committee:

- The outreach committee will seek to identify and compile data on the scope of situations, issues and constituencies that should inform the agenda of the Conference and be represented by conference participants. Communication with diverse constituencies needs to be initiated before the Conference, with a view to involving conference participants in an active and focused manner;
- The groups that need to be identified should include groups that are subject to human rights violations of civil, political, social, economic, or cultural nature, as well as groups that need to be informed about human rights issues and their role in addressing them, such as media, private sector, philanthropists, or local authorities;
- The thematic committee will develop central themes and invite the input of experts in the topic at hand;
- The research and website committee would be renamed the research and information and communication committee. It can also help facilitate the work of the other sub-committees by keeping track of their developments;
- The website should be dynamic, and include relevant links to human rights related news stories, information and initiatives;
- The website should also facilitate the nomination of speakers and the compilation of data;
- The media committee will produce a daily newsletter of the conference providing a clear, constructive open voice. Student journalists based in Paris could be involved in that capacity;
- Information on the conference should be disseminated to all regions ;
- The matter of particular interpretation needs for participants, such as sign language, or languages not included among the UN's six official languages, as well as information on the application for visas for France, could be addressed in part by the specific requests/needs committee;
- A budget to sponsor the travel and accommodation of NGO representatives and human rights defenders and victims from the grass-roots needs to be considered. NGOs with representatives in the field would be encouraged to help support the participation of their colleagues working on the ground. Professional fundraising opportunities would also be explored;
- An orientation to Paris for participants can be offered by the travel and accommodation committee;
- The midday workshops committee could envisage holding parallel workshops in various locations worldwide for NGO representatives who are unable to attend the Conference in person;
- The youth committee was suggested to be renamed multi-generational committee to facilitate and to foster mentoring and helpful exchanges among seasoned NGO representatives and young people who are new to the process;

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**4. Next Meeting**

The next Planning Committee meeting was announced for Friday, 25 January 2008 2-5 pm; this was subsequently changed to 31 January at the same time, in Conf. Room 3.