

5 September 2008

**Statement of Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann,
President of the 63rd Session of the General Assembly,
at the closing session of the 61st Annual DPI/NGO Conference**

I am very pleased to send my warm regards to all of you participating in the Annual DPI/ NGO Conference in Paris, entitled “Reaffirming Human Rights for All: The Universal Declaration at 60”. During the past three days you have, as key stakeholders in the United Nations Charter, reaffirmed your unwavering commitment to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Over six decades, the United Nations has painstakingly built on this seminal document, identifying many rights that flow from it.

Now we are in a period when these rights must be implemented, fully and without compromise. The role of civil society in advocating and defending our rights is at the heart of this process. We must embrace our responsibility to treat each other – and protect each other - as the brothers and sisters we all are. It is our responsibility to provide the leadership, challenge business as usual and open new frontiers that will ensure the relevance of the United Nations in the years ahead.

As President of the upcoming 63rd Session of the General Assembly, I assure you that I will press Member States to carry out their commitments to international law, including to the spirit of the UN Charter and UDHR. Universal enjoyment of our rights remains a distant goal when half the world’s population lives in poverty; and, I ask, how can we assure our security and wellbeing when violence, most often terror inflicted by our own Member States, bursts into our lives without reason and without warning. We must unite to find ways to end this impunity at every level.

Our rights and assertion of dignity and justice must continue to be expanded. The right to water, for example, which has been undermined by the insidious trend to privatize this precious source of life, needs to be counted within our Bill of Rights. I intend to make this, and other life and death issues, the priorities of the upcoming Session.

I know I can count on you, dear Sisters and Brothers, who are so aware of the threats that face us as peoples and as a planet, to press our fellow citizens and our governments to transcend their immediate and often petty self interests. This can only be done if we profoundly alter our mindsets and reorganize our institutions, and this will include democratizing the United Nations itself, so that they respond to the will of “We the peoples.”

I salute your gathering in Paris and the efforts underway to reach out to new civil society constituencies in developing countries, particularly Africa. I look forward to September next year I hope to join you personally at the DPI/NGO Conference which will deal with the crucial themes of disarmament. I thank you for your solidarity and look forward to your active participation in the upcoming 63rd Session of the General Assembly.