

20 June 2009

**Statement of Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann,  
President of the 63rd Session of the General Assembly,  
to the Civil Society Event of People's Voices on the Crisis**

Dear Friends,  
Representatives of Non-Governmental Organizations and Civil Society Networks,  
Brothers and Sisters All,

It is truly a pleasure to join you here in the Church of the Holy Trinity on the eve of the United Nations Conference on the World Financial and Economic Crisis and Its Impact on Development. I know that I am among friends and family here, and it warms my heart to feel the enormous energy and solidarity that you have brought with you from all parts of the world.

I am grateful to all of you for your hard work on behalf of the Conference, and more importantly, on behalf of the billions of people whose voices have yet to be heard as we try to build a more equitable and just world. Let me thank, in particular, and Roberto Bissio of Social Watch and Elisa Peter of NGLS and their teams for working so hard to organize this event and inviting me to participate. They have worked patiently with my office on behalf of civil society and assisted us in the arrangements so that many of you will have access to UN headquarters during the three-day meeting next week.

I imagine that many of you are anxious to hear news about the prospects for the Conference. As you know, it has been surrounded by controversy from its very inception last December at the Review Conference on Financing for Development in Doha. There, Member States asked me to organize a meeting at the highest in response to the global economic meltdown that was unfolding around us.

In Doha, I was grateful for the presence and support of so many NGOs and welcomed their parallel Declaration, which is a lucid and far-reaching appeal for action on the issues that Member States continue to grapple with. You are way ahead of us. I share the vision outlined in that Declaration and requested that it be posted on our conference website as a valuable benchmark for the intergovernmental negotiations on the conference outcome document that continue as I speak.

During the subsequent months of difficult negotiations to define the aims of the conference, Member States decided that it should address the impact of the crisis, particularly on the more vulnerable developing country economies. And just as important, it was decided, not without serious resistance, that the conference explore reforms and changes in the international financial architecture that might bring new stability and good governance to the global economy.

Sadly, many countries do not want to see this conference succeed in these ambitious goals. But let me share with you some of the expectations that many, if not most, Member States have for the meeting and its all-important follow-up.

This conference is about bringing the discussion about economic reforms to the United Nations. We must ensure that the countries most affected by the crisis have a real voice in solving this global crisis. We have had summits of the G8 and the G20 and other ad hoc groups. Now let us give the G192 their opportunity to express their concerns and needs and concrete recommendations. The involvement of the G192 is required if we want to get everyone behind a sustainable recovery and, more importantly, have every country benefit from the recovery.

This conference is about change. The other groups have contributed helpful proposals for emergency measures to counter the meltdown and protect their narrow interests as if they were everyone's. But they have largely avoided any proposals for far-reaching reform that will prevent such turmoil from happening again. This conference should be seen as an opportunity to initiate a global conversation about global economic governance and ways to make our international institutions more representative and inclusive, now and in the decades to come.

In the last six months, the financial and economic situation has only gotten worse, tipping tens of millions of people into extreme poverty in developing and industrialized countries alike. And despite the growing need for major changes, many Member States, particularly those in the North, increasingly resist reforms of the IMF and the World Bank, hoping that things will return to business as usual. And they have also made it very clear that they do not want a serious global conversation to take place at the United Nations.

While I hope, as all of us do, that the current collapse does not degenerate into a prolonged global depression, I share the widely held view that we cannot and must not return to business as usual.

Profound and, as yet, not fully understood systemic changes are underway. Economists and policy makers remain unsure when our economies will emerge from this turmoil, but we know they will be radically reordered. Despite this uncertainty, we must seize this opportunity to identify changes that will not only stabilize our economies in the short term, but methodically undertake the changes and create the instruments that will ensure stability and equity for all nations and all peoples.

This conference is the result of a difficult process. Imagine: Security Council reform has taken 15 years so far. With the help of eminent economists like Joseph Stiglitz, the Presidential Expert Commission has come up with a remarkable set of recommendations to consider in a few short months. So as disappointed as I sometimes feel, I should not be surprised by the twists and turns that have characterized the negotiations of the outcome document that will reflect the results of the conference.

As I speak, Member States continue to negotiate the outcome document. I suspect the document they finally approve will be very different from the versions you may have seen along the way.

Support for the conference process has eroded during the preparation process. Some governments are determined to resist a possible challenge to their control over key financial and monetary institutions. Others feel a process of serious review will strengthen policies and institutions that undermine their economic development and sovereign rights.

Still, this conference should be seen as the beginning of a dialogue that we must continue on an urgent basis in the months and years ahead. We must rebuild trust, which is central to international relations, economic life and confidence in our global institutions.

And this, of course, includes revitalization of the UN, which in its current state is unable to fulfil the mandates enshrined in its Charter. It is clear to me that the UN should be the place where global financial and economic crisis should be addressed.

This conference is about the poor and vulnerable citizens of the world. While people in virtually all countries are affected by the downturn and fearful of the future, developing countries are most affected, although they have contributed least to the economic calamities that now rain down upon them. They cannot print money to cushion the impact on their domestic economies. Like the industrial north, they need immediate access to credit markets, assurances of fair trade and more debt relief. (More here)

This conference is about facing the fact that we are all in this together. It is not a donors' conference. Developing countries are not looking for handouts. The stimulus packages of the North will have greater impact and restore needed global aggregate demand only if they are extended to the middle and small countries that account for 40 per cent of world trade (check this figure). If they are not part of the stimulus, global recovery will be put into jeopardy.

This is a conference that should advance new ideas about how we are going to rebuild the economy. It is about creating new paradigms that replace hyper-consumerism with a new awareness of our stewardship of Mother Earth. That provide powerful and sustained incentives to develop sources of alternative energy. That channel needed funding and technologies to the billion small farmers and fisherman to ensure food security for all. The list of challenges and opportunities is endless. You know them better than I.

In conclusion, let me say a few words about the role of civil society organizations. This conference is about raising new awareness of the billions of people who have been denied the opportunities of globalization that so many of us take for granted. You are in the forefront of this work. We must help people recognize the inherent injustices of the neo-liberal model and the failure of the almighty market.

Business and many governments have lost the sense of commitment to the wellbeing of the people. The business of business is business, we are told. But the current crisis provides us with the opportunity to inject a new spirit of responsibility and solidarity with our less fortunate Sisters and Brothers. It is a chance to insert morality and codes of ethics that temper the selfishness and recklessness that have characterized the excesses of recent decades.

You as representatives of civil society have long been aware of the complexities of this downturn and its interconnections with other global crises, from climate change, to the AIDS pandemic, to food and energy problems and others. You have helped the United Nations recognize that a holistic approach is needed to meet these challenges.

My vision of the reforms and changes that are needed coincide much more closely with those put forward by civil society -- by your networks -- than they do with many Member States. I have been criticized for expressing my views as President of the General Assembly. This criticism reflects the erosion of authority of the Presidency over the decades, something I have attempted to reverse during my short tenure.

My aim -- I see it as my obligation as president though some have described it as megalomaniacal -- has been to restore the authority and the credibility of the General Assembly and, by extension, the entire United Nations system in the eyes of the world. This is clearly an uphill battle, but I remain convinced that the UN is the uniquely representative forum where issues of global governance can be most productively discussed.

Working at this level and with so many competing, often petty national interests, is so hard. But I remain convinced this Organization deserves your support. You must aggressively press the process of restoring the central role of the UN as a genuine arbiter for "We the peoples". It is a process that you must monitor and influence in every way possible as representatives of civil society.

I would have liked to end here on a positive note. I would have liked to assure you that this conference is a historic opportunity to reassert the UN into the heart of the debate over our collective economic future. That we are at a transformative moment in our human odyssey. But it is clear to me that we must redouble our efforts for change; that we cannot count on a vision of better future alone. I see now that we must us work together in the days and months ahead to fight the good fight for the here and now. Let's keep at it.

Thank you.