

**THE SECRETARY-GENERAL**

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**REMARKS AT 59<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL DPI-NGO CONFERENCE  
New York, 8 September 2006**

It gives me great pleasure to join all of you today. As you know, much of my daily schedule involves contacts with Governments. Yet, much of what I have achieved as Secretary-General was made possible by your support and involvement.

That is why, as I approach my own transition from public servant to private life, I am particularly delighted to be amongst so many civil society representatives from all over of the world who have gathered here to learn, exchange ideas and build ties.

Today, I look back with some pride and satisfaction on a decade in which UN-civil society interactions have both widened and deepened.

As the title of this year's Conference recognizes, our relationship is one of a strong and developing partnership. Non-governmental organizations continue to be essential allies of the United Nations, not only in mobilizing public opinion, but also in the process of policy formulation and in making them work on the ground; at the country and community levels.

At the intergovernmental level, the past few years have seen the General Assembly hold informal hearings with NGO representatives and the private sector relating to migration and development, HIV/AIDS, the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries and in the run-up to the 2005 World Summit.

At the national level, United Nations resident coordinators work closely with representatives of civil society at the municipal and local levels.

These ties reflect a conscious effort by the United Nations to expand our outreach to NGOs and the private sector. But they also stem from a remarkable expansion of civil society's role in the stewardship of a changing world, and your growing leadership in areas where Government have sometimes been unwilling or unable to act.

Since the Earth Summit in 1992, civil society has made its mark on a series of world conferences on such vital issues as the environment, human rights, population, poverty and the advancement of women. You have made your voices heard. But in recent years, you have done more than that. You have made your influence felt. From debt relief and disease to good governance and human rights, the global NGO revolution—a revolution driven by citizens the world over—has helped move the global agenda and given new life and new meaning to the idea of an international community.

More and more, the initiative in taking action to improve the human conditions comes from voluntary groups such as yours.

As a result, while representative democracy remains the uniquely legitimate method of collective decision-making, participatory democracy is increasingly important. The ability of civil society to articulate the interests of citizens, to interact directly with Governments and to participate directly in policy debates at the national and international levels, helps to bridge the gap between democratic theory and practice.

Where once large international meetings and conferences were almost exclusively the realm of Governments, today it would be unthinkable to stage such events without your policy perspectives, unique advocacy and mobilization.

Where once governance was limited to Governments, today civil society is part of various global governance structures, from UNAIDS to the Internet Governance Forum.

Where once monitoring and enforcement were largely the role of Governments, today civil society often leads in ensuring compliance with international agreements, on issues ranging from human rights and child labour to the environment and corporate social responsibility.

Where once checks and balances in democratic societies were largely the domain of national parliaments, today a vibrant civil society provides a vital check on State excess.

And where once agendas were set by Governments, today you have brought new issues to the table.

Your accomplishments are impressive. You have been instrumental in, for instance, the global fight against infectious disease and fostering public debate on poverty.

You lobbied successfully for the Ottawa Convention banning the use of landmines. By campaigning for the Statute of the International Criminal Court, you ensured that the victims of genocide, mass rape and other war crimes will in future have at least some hope of justice. And your grassroots campaigns helped persuade governments to provide substantial debt relief to the poorest countries, as well as directing the savings towards poverty reduction programmes.

This year, your advocacy was critical in the establishment of the UN's new Human Rights Council.

And just last month, UN Member States reached agreement on a landmark international Convention on the rights of disabled people. The Convention arose from many years of advocacy by disability rights organizations, which participated in every stage of the negotiation and were crucial to the final outcome. Without their determined advocacy and engagement, I believe this important agreement may never have been realized.

Clearly, your growing power is fostering change. In a time where government leaders and media tend to focus on clashes of values and beliefs, our partnerships help to bridge such divides and provide a different vision. Our diversity contributes to the legitimacy of our common democratic ideals. Indeed, such interactions lead the UN's broader efforts to promote understanding and tolerance through the Alliance of Civilizations initiative, whose High-Level Group recently concluded meetings here in New York.

You have that capacity to push the envelope and say and do things that we cannot. In some areas, you lead and we catch up. That is why I am so glad for your support and of your example. There is much we can and must do.

Looking ahead, I see a civil society role with virtually no limits, but one which gives you solemn obligations to your constituents. You wield growing influence, but you must wield it responsibly. You must work to strengthen alliances—with the UN, the private sector, the public sector and among yourselves—that minimize duplication and maximize impact.

As you do so, the UN will be privileged to work closely with you for a peaceful, more prosperous world. Indeed, I see a world of opportunities for stronger ties between us. I see us making greater strides together towards a just, democratic and peaceful future for all. I see a United Nations keenly aware that if our unfinished agenda—in human security, in sustainable development and beyond—is to be realized, we must share our knowledge and reinforce our actions. I see a United Nations that celebrates the non-governmental revolution—the power of the global citizen—as the best thing that has happened to our Organization in a long time.

Thank you very much.