



DPI/NGO Conference 2006
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*“Unfinished Business:
Effective Partnerships for Human Security
and Sustainable Development”*

Welcome statement by
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Mr. President, Mr. Under-Secretary-General,
Ladies and Gentlemen, Friends and Colleagues of the NGO family,

It is a great privilege for me to be here again and to convey a welcome message to all of you in the name of the Conference of NGOs in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations (CONGO). I would like to thank DPI and its Officials, but also most warmly Joan and Michaela, to associate CONGO again to this great event. With its more than 500 members, some of them large networks in themselves, CONGO is indeed a vast umbrella association whose mandate is to enhance consultative status, support and empower civil society to bring ever better contributions to the United Nations and thus be a genuine support mechanism that strives to build effective partnerships with the United Nations to achieve human security and sustainable development.

The title of this year's Conference is provoking: it suggests that effective partnerships have yet to be built if human security and sustainable development are to be achieved. They are defined as "an unfinished business". One could say that if we have come so numerous here today, it is because we do believe in the power and strength of the partnership that we, as NGOs, create with the United Nations. We are convinced that it is worthwhile to be associated with the DPI and/or to have consultative status with the ECOSOC. We do know – as does the Secretary-General – that UN cooperation with civil society is not an option, it is a necessity!

However, the multi-stakeholder partnerships that are needed to respond to the complex challenges of the 21st century are broader than this classical type of relation that dates back to the founding of the UN. As the Under-Secretary-General Shashi Tharoor has recently stated, we work with a 20th century Organization that has to solve 21st century problems: problems without border and without passport, which have become the responsibility of the whole mankind. Hence the UN needs to evolve, but NGOs have to evolve too.

Two years ago, the report of the Cardoso panel on UN – CS relations received a "fresh" and also "mixed" reaction by NGOs, among others because it exhorted to open up the Organization to other civil society actors we are not always used to collaborate with: local authorities, parliamentarians, trade unions. It also exhorted the NGOs and the UN to work closer with the private sector and we all know the reluctances many NGOs activists still have about this kind of collaboration.

As CONGO, we organized in June an NGO forum to the ECOSOC High-level segment (HLS) on employment and decent work, together with the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and other unions. The Forum had a great success and produced an excellent set of recommendations that was the basis of a following lively Interactive Dialogue with members of the HLS. Nevertheless, the difficulty of NGOs and some trade unions to work together is well known and widely acknowledged. However, if we want to achieve sustainable development, both types of civil society organizations have to join forces and be ready to ask themselves “unfinished questions” such as the ones of representivity, legitimacy, transparency, while at the same time keeping their own specificities.

In a world that is fast moving from a traditional type of “representative democracy” to “participatory democracy” our responsibility is growing every day. The reality is there: people are often sceptic about politicians; particularly in “old democracies” many citizens are not interested in voting and being elected, but prefer to try to make another world possible by engaging into the associative life.

In parallel, the international community of governments is shifting to a global community of various actors: governments, international organizations, civil society and the private sector, that have the responsibility to get together and implement the “multi-stakeholder approach” initiated at the Johannesburg Summit in 2002 and consolidated at the most recent World Summit on the Information Society (2003 – 2005)

Whatever the judgment is on the effectiveness of this Summit, the process has been unique: for the first time, governments and civil society and the private sector have worked almost on the same footing to organize the Summit, conduct and conclude it. The follow up will create even more opportunities for partnerships, in particular through the Global Alliance for Information, Communication Technologies (ICTs) and Development (GAID). It is precisely the responsibility of NGOs to increase the interest of the private sector in the activities of the United Nations, encouraging corporate social responsibility, while keeping in mind that every actor has its specific role, and we as CONGO say: should have its own entry point into the UN and the right and duty to keep a critical attitude.

Implementing the Millennium Declaration and achieving the Millennium Development Goals is probably THE issue around which the most effective multi-stakeholder partnerships have to be created. NGOs and CSOs can provide invaluable expertise to monitor governments' implementation of the commitments they have voluntarily taken; can contribute directly to achieving the Goals and raise the awareness of the public opinion and the media about the existence of the Goals. The private sector can provide important financial resources and the most recent contributions of some well known multinationals to the fight against AIDS, malaria and other diseases is under the eyes of us all. And let us think now, how we will all stand up **against poverty** later in October and join the Millennium and other world campaigns in a united effort!

Since this Conference takes place just before the beginning of the annual session of the General Assembly, we cannot forget here the CS Hearings with the GA, the first ever last year devoted to UN reform and review of the Millennium+5 Summit and this year on the issues of Migration and Least Developed Countries. These are an "acquis" civil society should be proud of and strive to keep and reinforce. However, they should not replace any existing mechanisms of CS participation such as we have experienced during the great UN World Conferences of the 90s or the WSIS Summit, nor should they close the door for pursuing more institutionalized ways of interaction with the GA.

With the creation of the new Human Rights Council -a subsidiary organ of the General Assembly, not of ECOSOC any more- it is worth mentioning that NGOs are beginning to have good cooperation with the Council that replaced the Commission. Despite this institutional shift, NGOs have fought to keep in this new body at least the same level of participation they used to have in the old Commission and up to now we cannot complain but have to remain vigilant.

Finally, one cannot talk about "human security" without mentioning the Security Council and the need for it to become more open to people, that is to civil society organizations. The knowledge of NGOs about specific situations on the ground is unique and their views are – or at least should be – impartial and independent.

Today, at the dawn of the 21st century, the opportunities to strengthen partnerships to achieve sustainable development and human security seem to be numerous. However, the international context is not very favourable to fully utilize the NGO/CS reservoir of support for the United Nations. But new and stronger partnerships are an unavoidable necessity and a yet “unfinished business” that the international community needs to finalize quickly. The sooner the better!

I wish us great deliberations!