

OPENING WELCOME UN/NGO 59TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE - SEPT 6, 2006
MICHAELA WALSH, CHAIRWOMAN

IT IS AN HONOR AND A PLEASURE FOR ME AS CHAIRWOMAN TO WELCOME YOU TODAY TO THIS, THE 59TH ANNUAL NGO CONFERENCE AND TO HAVE SERVED AS CO-CHAIR OF OUR PLANNING COMMITTEE ALONG WITH JUAN CARLOS BRANDT. LET ME ADD THAT IT HAS BEEN A PROFOUND EDUCATION WORKING WITH MANY DEDICATED PROFESSIONALS OF THE UN AND NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS THAT HAVE SERVED AS LONG-TERM SUPPORTERS OF THE GOALS AND VISION OF THE UNITED NATIONS. YOU HAVE DEMONSTRATED WHAT IT MEANS TO BE LOYAL PARTNERS WITH GOVERNMENT MEMBERS, AND HAVE HELPED MANY OF US TO WORK TOGETHER TO UNDERSTAND THESE GOALS- INCLUDING THE MILLENIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS.

MANY HAVE ASKED ME "WHY DID I ACCEPT THIS CHALLENGE".

I BELIEVE IN THE COMMITMENT AND THE IMPACT OF NGO'S, BUT AS YOU WILL LEARN FROM LESTER SALAMON LATER TODAY AND OTHERS WHO HAVE AGREED TO PARTICIPATE DURING THE NEXT THREE DAYS, I BELIEVE THAT IT IS IMPORTANT TO REDEFINE HOW WE THINK ABOUT THIS SECTOR OF OUR LOCAL AND GLOBAL SOCIETY AND ITS ECONOMIES

AS I LEARNED OVER THIRTY YEARS AGO WHEN I HAD LEFT A WALL STREET CAREER AND BEGAN WORKING WITH THE UN TO HELP CREATE CREATE WHAT IS NOW WOMENS WORLD BANKING, WOMEN AND MOST PEOPLE IN THE WORLD KNOW BETTER WHAT THEY NEED AND WANT

THAN DO EXPERTS OR GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATIVES. WHEN I
ACCEPTED THIS APPOINTMENT

I MADE IT CLEAR THAT
INVOLVING THE YOUTH VOICE IN THE CONFERENCE WAS MY FIRST
PRIORITY, AS A PERCENTAGE OF EACH NGO AND AS SPEAKERS,

ALL SESSIONS WOULD BE DESIGNED WITH SPEAKERS WHO WOULD
ENGAGE PARTICIPANTS IN DIALOGUES ABOUT SPECIFIC PROJECTS
THAT WORK OR DO NOT WORK AND WHY. AND

THIS IS NOT A CONFERENCE FOR POLITICAL SPEECHES, ACADEMIC
THEORIES, OR GOVERNMENT STATISTICS. WE WANT TO ENCOURAGE
EACH PARTICIPANT TO ENGAGE IN DISCUSSIONS WITH OTHERS WHOM
YOU DO KNOW, LEARNING NEW INFORMATION ABOUT THE WORLD AND
DETERMINING WHAT YOU FEEL IMPORTANT. EACH SPEAKER HAS BEEN
INVITED TO STIMULATE AND CHALLENGE PARTICIPANTS TO BELIEVE
THAT WE CAN CHANGE THE WAY THE WORLD WORKS.
WHILE THE UN CAN FEEL INTIMIDATING AT FIRST, IT IS WHERE I FIRST
HAD CONFIDENCE THAT I MICHAELA WALSH FROM KANSAS CITY
MISSOURI COULD MAKE A DIFFERENCE. I HOPE EACH PARTICIPANT WHO
HAS ALSO MADE A PERSONAL DIFFERENCE IN THE LIVES OF OTHERS
BECAUSE OF YOUR WORK WITH THE UN SYSTEM, THAT YOU WILL
CONNECT WITH THOSE WHO ARE NEW TO THESE HALLOW HALLS AND
WILL HELP THEM TO THINK ABOUT WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO THEM. AS
MY FRIEND JOAN DUNLOP SAYS, "THE UN IS OUR ONLY GLOBAL
CORRIDOR FOR CIVILIZED CONVERSATION" I WOULD ADD THAT THE
INSTITUTION WE CALL THE UN IS ALL ABOUT PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS.

WHY THE YOUTH VOICE. FOR THIS 59TH ANNUAL NGO CONFERENCE?

THE AGES OF YOU PARTICIPANTS SPAN ABOUT 59 YEARS. MANY HAVE QUESTIONED THE NEED FOR THIS AGE DIVERSITY. BUT GIVEN THE AGE OF THE POPULATION OF MANY COUNTRIES TODAY (50% UNDER 15 IN SOME COUNTRIES – 50% UNDER 30 IN OTHERS) IS A REALITY THAT WE NEED TO GIVE VOICE TO.

IT IS IMPORTANT FOR US TO HELP THIS GENERATION TO UNDERSTAND THE HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE FOUNDING OF THE UN DURING OUR LIFETIME. IT IS EQUALLY IMPORTANT THAT THE YOUNGER GENERATION KNOW THAT WE ARE HERE TO ENCOURAGE AND SUPPORT THEM IN TAKING WHATEVER RISKS ARE REQUIRED IN TODAYS GLOBAL SOCIETY FOR THEM TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR HELPING DESIGN THE FUTURE OF OUR WORLD..

AS ONE OF OUR SUBCOMMITTEE CO-CHAIRS SAYS: "THIS IS A GENERATION WHO DOESN'T KNOW LIFE WITHOUT SMS OR TEXT MESSAGING. A GENERATION WHO HAS BILLIONS OF WEB PAGES AVAILABLE TO THEM WITH THE CLICK OF A MOUSE. A GENERATION WHO CAN CREATE A WEBSITE OR BLOG AND INSTANANEOUSLY COMMUNICATE YOUR THOUGHTS, IDEAS AND ACTIONS WITH LITERALLY MILLIONS. AT NO COST.

ONE SPEAKER WILL DEMONSTRATE HOW WE THE PUBLIC CAN ADAPT GOVERNMENT STATISTICS TO NEW INFORMATION THAT CHANGES THE

MAP OF THE WORLD FROM AFRICA, ASIA, LATIN AMERICA TO SPECIFIC COUNTRY REALITIES AND WITH ROLLING IMAGES OF HOW THE WORLD HAS CHANGED IN THE PAST 50 YEARS. WHEN HE ASKED THE UNITED NATIONS STATISTICAL DEPARTMENT FOR SOME OF THIS DATA, THE RESPONSE WAS: "THAT INFORMATION IS NOT IMPOSSIBLE - WE JUST CANNOT DO IT" IT'S A GREAT EXAMPLE ABOUT HOW PUBLIC CITIZENS CAN USE AND ANALYZE GOVERNMENT TECHNOLOGY THAT WE HAD NO ACCESS TO IN THE PAST. KNOWING THIS, IT IS NOW CRUCIAL THAT WE ALL FACE THE REALITIES OF THE GLOBAL DIGITAL DIVIDE AND COMMIT OURSELVES TO WORKING TOGETHER TO CLOSE THAT GAP IN ORDER TO ASSURE THAT ALL YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE ACCESS TO INFORMATION THAT SHOWS HOW TO CHANGE THE WORLD AS WE KNOW IT TODAY - THIS DIGITAL DIVIDE GAP, THE FACT THAT 50% OF PEOPLE IN MANY COUNTRIES HAVE NO CLEAN WATER OR ELECTRICITY, THAT GLOBAL WARMING IS DESTROYING OUR NATURAL ENVIRONMENT AND OUR SENSE OF SECURITY - THESE ARE WHAT THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS ARE ALL ABOUT.

ONE OF THE OBJECTIVES OF THE ANNUAL NGO CONFERENCE HAS ALWAYS BEEN TO NETWORK WITH EACH OTHER, TO LEARN HOW TO BETTER WORK AS PARTNERS WITH THE UN. THIS YEAR WE HAVE FOCUSED ON IDENTIFYING PARTNERSHIPS WITH THE BUSINESS AND ACADEMIC COMMUNITIES WHO ARE ALREADY CHANGING THE WAY THE WORLD WORKS. EFFORTS TO ATTAIN THE MDGS GO HAND IN HAND

WITH PEACE! THROUGHOUT THE WORLD – BUT THE WORLD ECONOMY
CANNOT AFFORD THESE EFFORTS AND THE COSTS OF WAR. WAR
CANNOT BE AVOIDED WITHOUT OUR INDIVIDUAL CAPACITY TO LEARN TO
TRUST DIVERSITY, DIFFERENT IDEAS AND ABOVE ALL DIFFERENT
CULTURES AND DIFFERENT GENERATIONS IN CLOSING I WOULD LIKE TO
ASK EACH PARTICIPANT WHO IS UNDER 30 YEARS OLD TO PLEASE STAND.
UP! UP! UP! AND NOW, THOSE WHO FEEL 30!

AS WE LEAVE THIS OPENING SESSION, I ASK EACH OF YOU TO
INTRODUCE YOURSELF TO ONE MORE MATURE NGO WHOM YOU DO NOT
KNOW, EXCHANGE NAMES AND EMAILS AND AGREE TO RECONNECT
BEFORE THE CLOSE ON FRIDAY AFTERNOON TO SHARE WITH EACH
OTHER ONE NEW IDEA THAT YOU ARE TAKING AWAY FROM THIS
MEETING.

IF 25% OF YOU SUCCEED IN DOING THIS, WE CAN HOPE THAT IT WILL
HAVE CHANGED THE WAY THE UN THINKS AND I KNOW YOU WILL
CHANGE THE WAY THE WORLD WORKS.

I LOOK FORWARD TO SHARING THE NEXT THREE DAYS WITH YOU.

THANK YOU