



***The United Nations and civil society –
70 years working together :
how do we make a difference from
Geneva ?***

22 June 2015 - Palais des Nations, Geneva

Summary report





The United Nations and civil society – 70 years working together: how do we make a difference from Geneva?

Monday, 22 June 2015 – Palais des Nations, Geneva – Room XI

Summary report

I. Introduction

1. On the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the United Nations, the Office of the Director-General at UNOG, together with the World Federation of United Nations Associations, the Non-Governmental Liaison Service (UN-NGLS) and the Conference of NGOs in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations (CoNGO), organized a one-day event. Some 150 participants from Permanent Missions, civil society and NGOs, International Organizations and academic institutions in Geneva discussed the relationship between the United Nations and civil society, exchanged experiences, practices and lessons learnt from their continued engagement. They also examined how the partnership between the United Nations and civil society could be strengthened further, and how the work in Geneva could have a stronger impact on the situation in different parts of the world.
2. Following the opening remarks, three panel discussions structured along the three overarching goals: peace, rights and well-being, along with the synergy of values and ideals of the United Nations, took place. Representatives of the United Nations, Permanent Missions, Non-Governmental Organizations and the academia served as panellists. *The programme is available in Annex I.*

II. Opening remarks

3. The opening session was chaired by **Ms. Flavia Pansieri, Deputy United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights**. The Deputy High Commissioner stressed that the commemoration of the United Nations anniversary served as an important assessment of the UN partnership with civil society. She recalled that civic activity was about building safe, stable and thriving democratic societies. She also emphasised that changing opinions and behaviours for the better was a long, hard, and often dangerous endeavour, and that, locally and globally, civil society actors encountered obstacles and punishments for their words and work. The involvement of civil society actors underpinned every activity of the United Nations, and therefore a dynamic, diverse and independent civil society, able to operate freely and safely, was essential. The Deputy High Commissioner affirmed that there was a need to advocate for the full enjoyment and exercise of public freedoms, and to robustly champion those practices and experiences from around the world that widen and deepen civic space. She called on the participants to reflect upon how to widen, deepen and improve the quality of participation of civil society in the work of the United Nations.

4. In his opening remarks, **Mr. Michael Møller, Director-General, a.i., United Nations Office at Geneva**, recalled that partnerships and multi-constituency coalitions of States, public and private actors, civil society and academia, were increasingly central to the achievement of common goals of the multilateral agenda. He gave an overview of the civil society engagement and its increasing role in the work of the United Nations. From 41 NGOs in 1945 to more than 4,000 NGOs in consultative status with ECOSOC this year, civil society actors advanced and shaped United Nations agendas and institutions. The Director-General recalled that the United Nations system relied on the expertise and active involvement of civil society actors at all levels. He pointed out that Geneva was home to some 400 NGOs in consultative status, and many more would come here from all over the world to participate in events and conferences. NGOs were also important partners of the Perception Change Project, which was launched in 2014 to showcase the substance generated by the UN family, and in particular in Geneva, in the vital areas of peace, rights and well-being.
5. The Director-General, a.i., highlighted some issues, which, in his view, merited discussion. One issue related to concerns voiced by NGOs regarding difficulties in applying and receiving consultative status with ECOSOC. Other challenges mentioned were the varying registration practices for NGOs and different roles of civil society in United Nations bodies. Some United Nations bodies did not even foresee any formal involvement of civil society in their work. Building an institutional culture within the United Nations that considers civil society organizations as valuable partners in the implementation of the UN's shared mission, should be stepped up, in his view. The Director-General, a.i., considered that the United Nations and its partner organizations should take a greater leadership role in creating an enabling environment for civil society participation and contribution. He also referred to the importance of civil society engagement in the elaboration and subsequent implementation of the post-2015 agenda.
6. Speaking on behalf of **Ambassador Park Soo-gil, the President of the World Federation of United Nations Associations (WFUNA)**, Ambassador Chang-beom Cho, Vice-President of WFUNA, introduced WFUNA as a global non-profit organization working for a stronger and more effective United Nations. Established in 1946, WFUNA represents and coordinates a membership of over 100 national United Nations Associations and their members. He affirmed that civil society organizations played a vital role in enabling people to claim their rights, in promoting rights-based approaches, in shaping development policies and partnerships, and in overseeing their implementation. As one of the first international NGOs to obtain ECOSOC status, as early as 1947, WFUNA has been witnessing the flourishing of civil society engagement with the United Nations. He was concerned by the shrinking space for civil society globally, and called attention to an increasing and alarming disconnect between the United Nations and the global civil society movement. He noted that civil society was often excluded from decision-making processes, and that UN entities treated their relations with civil society independently, offering different entry points for their participation. He noted that procedural and bureaucratic hurdles added to serious concerns about reprisals against human rights organizations engaging with the UN human rights mechanisms in several countries.
7. Ambassador Cho shared examples of important efforts to strengthen multilateral partnerships, such as the Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation in the Republic of Korea in 2011, which was agreed by civil society organizations as full

and equal participants, formally recognizing the need for a strong partnership with civil society in the achievement of development objectives. He also referred to the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) process, which included unprecedented efforts to include civil society organizations and the wider public in the consultations and negotiations processes. He highlighted the need for the United Nations to make more inclusive space for democratic participation in its work and processes by a broader civil society community, beyond NGOs in consultative status with ECOSOC only. Geneva is an example to follow in the UN system for its openness and inclusiveness of civil society, both with regard to the input of NGOs into UN decision making processes, as well as with regard to their prominent role in the follow-up and monitoring of the implementation of commitments.

III. Panel discussion I: United Nations and civil society actors for peace and human rights: achievements and the way forward

8. The panel discussion was chaired by Ambassador Chang-beom Cho, Vice President, World Federation of United Nations Associations (WFUNA). The panelists were Ms. Cecilia Cannon, Visiting Lecturer, Interdisciplinary Programmes, Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies; Ms. Anita Bay Bundegaard, Director, Save the Children; and Mr. Peter Splinter, Amnesty International Representative to the United Nations in Geneva.
9. **Ms. Cannon** shared some findings of the body of research examining non-state actors and their role in global governance. She shared that NGOs and academic communities played a central role in framing global challenges. They influence agenda-setting and the crafting of solutions at international and national level. NGOs motivate people to take action. Ms. Cannon highlighted the challenge of the disagreements on how today's global challenges should be defined, framed and addressed as various actors often possessed different, sometimes opposite, ideas, beliefs, and interests. The challenge was to manage and harness those various voices in order to generate effective solutions. Ms. Cannon provided two examples of negotiation policy processes to demonstrate this challenge. The first example concerned the drafting process of the 1984 Convention Against Torture. There was disagreement among the NGOs and Member States as to the monitoring option to be incorporated into the Convention (State report or external visiting). Rather than letting those disagreements hijack and stall the negotiations, the NGOs collaborated so that they could make the most of the access they enjoyed in the process. Those NGOs advocating external inspections ceded their preferences to ensure agreement was reached. Then, following adoption of the Convention, those NGOs continued to work towards establishing an international inspection system, which was finally formalised in the 2002 Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture. The second example concerned the negotiations leading to the 2000 UN Protocol on Trafficking in Persons. A lack of consensus on how to define trafficking constituted the main challenge in the drafting process. The result was that governments focused on repressive measures against illegal migration and organised crime, and the shared goals of NGOs were overlooked by disagreement. She added that trafficked persons gained little with the protocol, and governments failed to strengthen migrant human rights.
10. Ms. Cannon introduced the results of a research project that examined the formal opening up of International Organisations to non-state actors in policy processes. The study included a survey of 298 organisational bodies within 50 international organisations, including the United Nations. The findings showed that International

Organisations have been consistently most open in the areas of human rights, followed by development; and most closed in the areas of finance and security. In relation to the policy functions, NGOs would have most access in monitoring of international agreements, as well as implementation of projects. The least access for NGOs was to policy formation and decision-making. She pointed out that while NGOs focussed on having their input into international negotiations, there were ample opportunities for advocacy and impact in the monitoring and enforcement phases of international agreements after they have been negotiated. She also emphasised the challenge of NGOs to attract funding to adequately perform their monitoring and reporting role, especially years after the adoption of the agreements.

11. **Ms. Bundegaard** noted that the Save the Children's interaction and collaboration with international organisations dated back to the 1920s, when the founder of the NGO proposed a first statement of children's universal human rights, which contributed to all subsequent international children's rights treaties, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), in which children were explicitly recognized as rights-holders. Child rights organizations worked closely with the UN to ensure systematic monitoring of the CRC through supplementary reports to the CRC and then the Universal Periodic Review. Recommendations from those bodies were key in achieving legislative and policy change for children at the national level, including in relation to child health, education and protection. She gave an example of how child rights organizations worked closely with the UN and Member States to ensure children's voices were heard at the Human Rights Council. Ms. Bundegaard offered an example of the Save the Children's leading role in calling for recognition of education in emergencies as an integral part of the humanitarian response, and the establishment of the Education Cluster in 2008, uniquely co-led by UNICEF and Save the Children. Save the Children was also involved in co-leading the development of minimum standards on child protection in humanitarian action.
12. Ms. Bundegaard provided two examples of global coalitions encompassing civil society and UN agencies. One initiative, the global movement *Every Woman Every Child*, was launched by the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon during the United Nations Millennium Development Goals Summit in September 2010. It aimed at mobilizing and intensifying international and national action by various actors to address the major health challenges facing women and children around the world through the *Global Strategy for Women's and Children's Health*. Another example is *the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack*. She reaffirmed that a strong and independent civil society was essential for the realization of children's rights, and that civil society was also a space for children, hence there was a need to ensure that children were consulted on issues that affected them. She emphasised that as the world had globalized, civil society had to face the same challenges of legitimacy, effectiveness and accountability that were also affecting the UN system. She was concerned about the shrinking space for civil society in many countries. Based on the Save the Children experience, she offered some solutions on how those challenges could be overcome by civil society actors, including by expanding its membership and working with local civil society groups, working in places of limited access, and engaging collaboratively with the private sector and academia to build capacity of the new generation. She also underlined that the United Nations and civil society played complementary, but different roles, and therefore it was important to continue working together for the realization of shared goals.

13. **Mr. Splinter** offered his personal reflections about the place of civil society in the Human Rights Council and other human rights bodies. He pointed out that NGOs had a long and distinguished history of contributions to the human rights work of the United Nations, including the creation of institutions like the Human Rights Council, the Universal Periodic Review, the post of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, treaty bodies and special procedures. He noted that civil society's engagement with the UN human rights machinery included the work of the NGOs in consultative status with ECOSOC, but also the engagement of broader actors, mainly in the work of the Special Procedures or the Human Rights Treaty Bodies, which did not require consultative status as a pre-requisite for engagement. He also noted that ECOSOC status was not a requirement for cooperation between the UN and civil society at the national level, where the greatest challenges related to the implementation of the international human rights standards. He emphasised that in many countries the Universal Periodic Review had been a catalyst for valuable country-level discussions between civil society and governments. He underlined the importance for the UN and Member States to resist the efforts to limit civil society space in the area of human rights promotion and protection, both at headquarters and national levels.
14. Mr. Splinter characterized the sustained and growing NGO engagement with the Human Rights Council as positive and productive. Such an engagement included statements at various discussions, contribution to panel debates, participation in consultations on draft resolutions, and organization of parallel events. However, he noted that challenges remained, including in the tension between Member States that support robust NGO contributions and those that oppose it, which manifested themselves in points of order, intimidation and reprisals. Obtaining consultative status with ECOSOC presents another challenge, as the ECOSOC accreditation process is perceived as non-transparent and lengthy. In this respect, he noted that the 2004 Cardoso Report of the Panel of Eminent Persons on United Nations – Civil Society Relations contained proposals for improving the NGO accreditation procedures, which were worth revisiting. Other challenges included fewer places for NGO representatives in the Human Rights Council room, fewer opportunities for side events, and difficulties in obtaining speaking slots in the interactive dialogues. He stated the need to facilitate or support the contribution of NGOs from around the world, not only Geneva-based NGOs, to the work of the Council in order to reflect the breadth of priorities and interests of civil society in all regions. Mr. Splinter also noted the need for human rights to become a genuine element of discussion and decision-making on issues addressed in security, economic, developmental and other fora, and for opening up other parts of the UN to greater civil society participation.
15. In the discussion that followed, the panellists and participants examined ways to strengthen the partnership among the United Nations and civil society to promote peace and human rights worldwide, as well as the role of civil society as change-makers and the importance of solidarity among organizations in developing and implementing solutions to achieve common goals. Participants underlined the importance for civil society engagement at all levels and the need for improved access to the United Nations. A need for cross-UN system work on thematic issues was needed to avoid silos and generate innovative and sustainable solutions.

IV. Panel discussion II: The Post-2015 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): building a future for all

16. The panel discussion was chaired by Mr. Neil Buhne, Director, United Nations Development Programme Office in Geneva. The panelists were Ambassador Yvette Stevens, Permanent Mission of the Republic of Sierra Leone to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva; Mr. Joakim Reiter, Deputy Secretary General, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development; Ms. Bineta Diop, President, Femmes Africa Solidarité; and Ms. Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda, General Secretary, World Young Women Christian Association (YWCA).
17. **Mr. Buhne** provided a comprehensive overview of UNDP's role in supporting and implementing the future SDGs at the national level. He emphasized that as the designate coordinators of the Country Teams, UNDP provided the umbrella mechanism that met the specific needs of each country. This flexibility, adaptability, experience and institutional know-how was the key to translating the global vision into measurable, effective implementation. He underlined that civil society and its full integration into the process was essential to the success of the SDGs.
18. **Ambassador Stevens** emphasized the important role of civil society in development, especially in elaborating indicators, developing minimum standards, and implementing them at national level, as well as monitoring the implementation of the SDGs. She underlined that the less developed countries were getting a first-hand experience from the important work of civil society in education, water, and other pertinent issues. She mentioned that the Millennium Development Goals were an attempt to bring together major recommendations from global conferences. Despite certain achievements, MDGs lacked focus on quality. For example, schoolrooms were be provided, but the quality of education would not improve. She was of the view that the SDGs needed to also focus on quality and measurable indicators in order to ensure comprehensiveness of the standards to be met. She emphasised that not only the number of water sources, but also the water quality would be important. Ambassador Stevens praised the role of the civil society in delivering humanitarian assistance, for example, to refugees, in partnership with the UNHCR.
19. **Mr. Reiter** concluded that the international community was in the process of defining the content of the SDGs, while the answer to "how" was still pending. In his view, in terms of economic growth and growth trajectory required to meet the SDGs, the world would need to achieve China's growth rate in the last 50 years, without leaving a carbon footprint. This would require mobilization of actors and resources beyond the current level, as well as innovative solutions. He emphasised that everyone would need to adjust, and Member States would not be the only actors. Mr. Reiter underlined that the role of civil society in monitoring the implementation of the SDGs at the national level would be crucial. He was of the view that one key to success would be to have a set of effective indicators. He informed that in the UN Task Team on SDGs, the UNCTAD was in co-lead with the World Bank on *SDG17 Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development*. Mr. Reiter informed that UNCTAD would have a ministerial-level meeting following the adoption of the SDGs to discuss the implementation, and he encouraged civil society to get involved on the discussion of priorities.

20. **Ms. Diop**, whose NGO focuses on violence against women, acknowledged the progress achieved with the MDGs in Africa, which was possible also thanks to the contribution of civil society and women's groups, in particular in the areas of education and child mortality. She said that more progress was needed and that the new framework should be guided by a data revolution as there was a need for more monitoring, reporting and evaluation to make governments more accountable. She pointed out that civil society had to be vigilant not to lose its place at the negotiation table to the private sector. Ms. Diop gave an example of her NGO's engagement with the United Nations in the area of peace and security in the Central African Republic, when a group of like-minded governments and civil society actors worked together to develop a resolution of the Human Rights Council, which led to the appointment of the Independent Expert on the Human Rights in the Central African Republic. When the Independent Expert conducted her first mission to the country, civil society and women's groups were involved in the preparation of the visit and suggested that the visit be engendered. The Independent Expert met with relevant actors and groups of women to make sure their issues and concerns were reflected in her report to the Council. Ms. Diop expressed concern that access to resources was a challenge for civil society actors, as she was of the view that any growth achieved nationally should be inclusive to have an impact.
21. **Ms. Gumbonzvanda** commented on the negotiation process of the SDGs, wondering why the focus was still on defining the goals rather than implementing them. She gave as an example gender equality, which was an already agreed commitment, and found the need for reiteration frustrating. She underlined that the issue of resources for the implementation of the SDGs did not get the attention it required. She considered that governments needed to discuss uncomfortable issues, such as the mismanagement of resources and prioritization, and to demonstrate their political will to be accountable. For its part, the United Nations also needed to move from the developmental framework and approach of the MDGs to the stronger human rights approach of the SDGs. Having robust human rights monitoring would also enable civil society to have a stronger right of participation in the decision-making processes. Ms. Gumbonzvanda advocated for the need of an intergenerational approach, and emphasised the need to invest in youth and women. She said it was also important to change the semantics and focus. She was of the view that the focus should be less in the capacity building, and more in providing opportunities.
22. The discussion focused on issues surrounding the definition and subsequent implementation of the SDGs, including accountability and monitoring the implementation. The need for civil society to be heard in the discussions was underlined. The need for creating partnerships was also linked to the needs for resource mobilization. Caution was expressed against the process which channels funds to international NGOs, who, in turn, would use local grass-roots organizations as subcontractors. It was noted that the development of the SDGs was not an easy process as countries had different priorities, but overall, the SDGs would constitute a remarkable achievement of the international community in a people-centred approach, and they would have higher chances of success than the MDGs as lessons learnt were being taken into account. The role of civil society in the SDGs implementation stage would be crucial.

V. *Panel discussion III: United Nations and NGOs – Shared Ideals, Shared Values, Shared Futures*

23. The panel discussion was chaired by Mr. Cyril Ritchie, President, The Conference of NGOs in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations. The panelists were Ms. Barbro Svedberg, Head of MENA Programme, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF); Mr. Jan Lönn, Secretary General, International Youth and Student Movement for the United Nations (ISMUN); Ms. Renate Bloem, Head of Geneva Office, CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation; and Mr. Andrey Vasilyev, Deputy Executive Secretary, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe.
24. **Mr. Ritchie** estimated that the UN was the apex of multilateralism, and for that reason it was the target of much criticism from public opinion and the media. He added that despite this, unilateralism was not an alternative. He called for a strong, well-managed and adequately funded United Nations. He further highlighted the importance of recognizing the UN's shortcomings and imperfections, and praised the contribution of the civil society to the work of the organization.
25. **Ms. Svedberg** argued that to prevent war, we had to address its root causes, including militarism. She highlighted the inconsistencies between the goals of the United Nations and the current state of their implementation. She also enumerated the shortcomings of the Security Council for being dominated by self-interests of five permanent Member States, while the funds spent worldwide on the military could be spent elsewhere. Ms. Svedberg also criticized the Security Council for being unable to uphold international law. Evoking allegations of sexual exploitation by the UN peacekeepers, she recalled that immunity should not equal impunity, and called for stronger and more effective human rights field offices. She illustrated the effectiveness of actions of her NGO, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), in the case of the Syrian Arab Republic. WILPF channelled voices of women in Syria to the attention of the Human Rights Council, which gave an opportunity for the Council to hear about human rights violations from the affected people on the ground. She also underlined that as a result of human rights violations in the Middle East, some civil society organizations lost faith in the UN system. Concluding that there was too little integration between the commitments made 70 years ago and the mechanisms set in place to ensure accountability, Ms. Svedberg underlined the importance of the international community to renew those commitments.
26. **Mr. Lönn** referred to climate change and asserted that the current generation was the last one to have a chance of saving the planet. He recalled the centrality of the UN Charter, highlighting its universality. He also underlined that there were many more Member States in the United Nations currently than at its outset. He emphasized that the fight against racism was an area where NGOs collaborated closely with the United Nations, and called for a new UN Conference against racism. He also called for a global campaign to strengthen the United Nations, in particular as it concerned funding. He pointed out the reliance of the UN on voluntary contributions, which gave an opportunity to donor States to influence the Secretariat of the UN in certain areas, and called for campaigning from NGOs to intensify funding for the United Nations. In the same manner, he noted with concern the role of transnational corporations in the functioning of the United Nations. He affirmed that the role of transnational corporations in the international system, particularly in the United

Nations, should not be based on good intentions, but rather on a balanced exchange. He was of the view that the global public sector must be strengthened, and that erosion should be prevented also at the national level.

27. **Ms. Bloem** spoke about her rich experience as an observer and actor in the evolving engagement of civil society actors in the work of the United Nations over years. She recalled the UN World Conferences held in the 90s, such as the Earth Summit in Rio and the Women's Conference in Beijing), in which thousands of civil society actors could participate and play a role in shaping global agendas, including in relation to children, environment, human rights, population, social development, women, food and habitat. She asserted that in all their diversity, NGOs had found common grounds for consensus-building, while the United Nations had played a role of a catalyst by providing a forum where diverse points of views could be expressed and debated. She was concerned that since the attacks of 11 September 2001 in New York, and the ensuing global war on terror, the growing prominence of concerns about security and the expansion of counter-terrorist measures across the world threatened the space for civil society to flourish and act. CIVICUS's latest report noted that in the face of contemporary waves of protest, many governments felt threatened and had stepped up their efforts to close down civic space, through a combination of dubious legislation, the demonization of protest movements and direct harassment of civil society activists and their organizations. Efforts to close civil society space at the national level could also be observed at the international level, including the United Nations' mechanisms. She noted the positive developments at the Human Rights Council on the issue of civil society space through relevant resolutions in 2013 and 2014. She praised the spirit of cooperation among the United Nations and NGOs in Geneva that could serve as a good example for the broader UN system.
28. **Mr. Vasilyev** noted diverse interests and views of civil society on various issues of concern. He also stressed that Member States and NGOs had different, but complementary roles, and that one of the role of civil society was to advocate for accountability. He noted the importance for consultation with various actors for better outcomes and results. He described civil society as agents of change and also recalled the importance of engagement with the private sector. He provided an example of the UNECE and its engagement with the private sector.
29. The discussion that followed focused on the importance to adhering to the shared values and ideas in building the shared future.

VI. Closing remarks

30. The closing session was chaired by Mr. **Salman Bal, Senior Political Coordination Adviser**, Office of the Director-General, United Nations Office at Geneva.
31. In his closing remarks, **Ambassador Joachim Rucker, President of the Human Rights Council**, emphasized that the United Nations was created for everyone, not only for the States, because human rights, development and security was about human beings. He mentioned the universality of participation enshrined in the Human Rights Council's founding documents and noted that he could not imagine a credible, functional and effective Human Rights Council without the participation of civil society actors as it was natural and necessary for States and civil society to work together to tackle a variety of human rights challenges, such as combatting violence against women, eliminating all forms of racism, safeguarding the rights of the child or

ensuring the right to adequate housing for all. The President acknowledged that having more stakeholders at the table presented new challenges and different views on the best way to make progress, but for those issues it was even more important to work together, because through the participation of civil society, the Council was more relevant, more effective and more real. He noted that NGOs had a broad geographical reach, thereby often bridging the gap between the international, regional and national levels. NGOs helped translating the Council's work into action by triggering change and by striving for accountability. He characterized NGOs as potentially the most powerful ally to deliver results in human rights improvement on the ground. The President affirmed that without civil society participation, the United Nations could not fulfil its tasks set by the UN Charter. He also recalled that the cooperation with the United Nations should be safe, and noted with concern the cases of intimidation and reprisals against civil society actors. He strongly deplored means to restrict freedom of expression and assembly with a view to restrict NGOs. He also deplored means to curb the financing of NGOs, to label them as terrorist organizations or to introduce legal hurdles that NGOs could not continue their legitimate work. The President stressed that Geneva had many important lessons concerning civil society participation to offer to other parts of the United Nations. He expressed hope that the next decades of the United Nations would be marked by even more civil society participation.

32. In conclusion, **Mr. Michael Møller, Director-General, a.i., United Nations Office at Geneva**, thanked all speakers and participants of the event for their contributions to the discussion. He reaffirmed that civil society was a key actor for the United Nations as we worked towards shared goals and objectives. He noted the importance of the discussion on the Sustainable Development Goals, in which civil society was already engaged, and would play a crucial role in the implementation phase. Civil society contributions and inputs were essential to bring the work in Geneva closer to the situation on the ground and insert voices and practice from the national and grass-roots level into inter-governmental debates. He underlined the need to improve the communication efforts and to make the work of the United Nations more accessible to the wider audiences. The Director-General stressed the importance of listening to the voices of minorities, indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, youth, older persons, women and LGBT groups and others. It was also essential to act collectively for an enabling environment for civil society at all levels for their free, active, inclusive and meaningful engagement. He reaffirmed his commitment to continue his efforts to defend, sustain and enlarge the space for civil society at the Palais des Nations.

END

The United Nations and civil society – 70 years working together: how do we make a difference from Geneva?

Monday, 22 June 2015 – Palais des Nations, Geneva – Room XI

Programme

- 9.45** Arrival of participants
- 10.00** The opening will be chaired by Ms. Flavia Pansieri, United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights
- Welcome remarks by:
- Mr. Michael Møller, Director-General, a.i., United Nations Office at Geneva
 - Ambassador Park Soo-gil, President, World Federation of United Nations Associations (statement to be delivered by Ambassador Cho, Vice-President, WFUNA)
- 10.30** *United Nations and civil society actors for peace and human rights: achievements and the way forward*
- Chair of the panel discussion: Ambassador Chang-beom Cho, Vice President, World Federation of United Nations Associations
- Panellists:
- Ms. Cecilia Cannon, Visiting Lecturer, Interdisciplinary Programmes, Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies
 - Ms. Anita Bay Bundegaard, Director, Save the Children
 - Mr. Peter Splinter, Amnesty International Representative to the United Nations in Geneva
- Discussion
- 12.00** Lunch break
- 14.00** *The Post-2015 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals: building a future for all*
- Chair of the panel discussion: Mr. Neil Buhne, Director, United Nations Development Programme Office in Geneva
- Panellists:
- Ambassador Yvette Stevens, Permanent Mission of the Republic of Sierra Leone to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva
 - Mr. Joakim Reiter, Deputy Secretary General, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
 - Ms. Bineta Diop, President, Femmes Africa Solidarité
 - Ms. Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda, General Secretary, World Young Women Christian Association (YWCA)
- Discussion
- 15.00** Coffee Break

15.15 *United Nations and NGOs – Shared Ideals, Shared Values, Shared Futures (by CoNGO)*

Chair of the panel discussion: Mr. Cyril Ritchie, President, The Conference of NGOs in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations

Panellists:

- Ms. Barbro Svedberg, Head of MENA Programme, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)
- Mr. Jan Lönn, Secretary General, International Youth and Student Movement for the United Nations (ISMUN)
- Ms. Renate Bloem, Head of Geneva Office, CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation
- Mr. Andrey Vasilyev, Deputy Executive Secretary, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

Discussion

16.45 The closing will be chaired by Mr. Salman Bal, Senior Political Coordination Adviser, Office of the Director-General, United Nations Office at Geneva

Closing remarks:

- Ambassador Joachim Rucker, President of the Human Rights Council
- Mr. Michael Møller, Director-General, a.i., United Nations Office at Geneva

17.00 End of the event

17.00 – 18.30 Reception offered by Switzerland (*Hall 14, behind the Assembly Hall, building A, 3rd floor*)