

# CIVIL SOCIETY AND GLOBAL GOVERNANCE

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*“We have entered a new era of ever-greater partnership, and there are few limits to what civil society can achieve...it is clear that there is a new diplomacy where NGOs, international organizations and governments can come together to pursue their objectives”*

*(Kofi Annan, UN Secretary-General, May 7<sup>th</sup> 1999)*

*“In all its forms, civil society is probably the largest single factor in development, if not in its monetary contribution, then certainly in its human contribution and its experience and history” (James Wolfensohn, World Bank President, January 21<sup>st</sup> 1999)*

## **1. Introduction.**

Ten years ago, there was little talk of civil society<sup>2</sup> in the corridors of power, but now the walls reverberate, at least with the rhetoric of partnership, participation and the role of citizens' groups in promoting sustainable development. Though poorly-understood and imperfectly-applied in practice, concepts like the “new diplomacy”, “soft power” and “complex multilateralism” place civil society at the center of international policy debates and global problem-solving (Edwards 1999). This radical change in international relations bodes well for our common future, but it is also a highly-contested debate in which questions abound and answers are in short supply. In reality, “civil society” is an arena, not a thing, and although it is often seen as the key to future progressive politics this arena contains different and conflicting interests and agendas (Scholte 1999). For their part, global institutions are still the prisoners of a state-based system of international negotiation, and find it exceptionally difficult to open up to non-state participation at any meaningful level. We may dream of “global community” but we don't yet live in one, and too often, “global governance” means a system in which only the strong are represented and only the weak are punished. Resolving these deficiencies will be an immensely complex task for governments, Inter-Governmental Organizations, business and civil society to undertake together over the next many years. In this paper I pose three questions: why has civil society risen so quickly up the international agenda, what dilemmas lie ahead, and what should the United Nations be doing to reconcile the demands of the different actors who will shape the regimes of the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

## **2. The Rise and Rise of Civil Society.**

a) Changing ideas about international development.

There are at least three reasons for the resurgence of civil society in the international arena. The first concerns changing ideas about international development. In recent years, there has been a

significant move away from what was known as the “Washington Consensus” - the belief that market liberalization and Western-style democracy offered a universal blueprint for growth and poverty-reduction across the world. Central to the emerging “post-Washington Consensus” are a number of ideas that place civil society at the heart of the development policy debate. First, a strong social and institutional infrastructure is crucial to growth and development: “social capital” - a rich weave of social networks, norms and civic institutions - is just as important as other forms of capital to these ends. Second, more pluralistic forms of governance and decision-making are seen to be more effective in developing a social consensus about structural changes in the economy, and other key reforms: shared ownership of the development agenda is seen as the key to its sustainability. Third, public, private and civic roles are being re-conceptualized and re-shaped, in both economics and social policy; the best route to problem-solving lies through partnerships and alliances between these different actors. Fourth, international institutions require stronger public and political constituencies to support them; otherwise they will continue to lose legitimacy, with potentially fatal consequences.

Civil society is central to all these ideas, and to their successful application. Although the empirical evidence for some of the underlying assumptions is incomplete, there is already a consensus among the donor community that a “strong civil society” is crucial to successful development performance. Civil society has entered the mainstream of international development discourse as a topic of central concern.

a) New conceptions of governance.

Picking up on some of these ideas beyond the domestic arena, the second major shift concerns a quiet revolution in conceptions of international relations. When Kofi Annan talks of the “new diplomacy”, he is echoing a common perception that the characteristics of global governance – the rules, norms and institutions that govern public and private behavior across national boundaries - are changing in new and important ways (Annan 1998). As economic and cultural globalization proceed, the state’s monopoly over governance is challenged by the increasing influence of private actors, both for-profit and not-for-profit (Rosenau and Cziempel 1992; Archibugi and Held 1995). Corporations and private capital flows react very quickly to the opportunities provided by an increasingly integrated global market. By contrast, the response of states and civil society is necessarily slow, fragmented and messy, because of the demands of democracy and the need to negotiate among so many different interests. In theory, civil society can be a counterweight to the expanding influence of markets and the declining power of states, but in practice there are few formal structures through which this countervailing authority might be expressed, especially at the global level. Transnational NGO networks abound, but there is no world government to speak of and few global citizens to constitute a “global civil society” in the deeper meaning of that term. The result is a growing democratic deficit in the processes of global governance.

Despite these difficulties, it is already clear that governance in the next millennium is unlikely to mean a single framework of international law applied through a unified global authority. More likely is a multi-layered process of interaction between different forms of authority (states, citizens and markets), and different forms of regulation (laws, conventions, and social norms), working together to pursue common goals, resolve disputes, and negotiate new tradeoffs between conflicting interests. The early stages of this model of governance, described as “global public policy” by some (Kaul 1999; Reinicke 1998) and “multi-track diplomacy” by others (Smith et al 1998; Waterman 1998), can already be discerned in global environmental regimes such as the Montreal protocol, and in international, cross-sector campaigns over land-mines, debt, child labor and other high-profile issues. Civic groups play a key role in all these experiments: over 15,000 transnational civic networks are already active on the global stage, 90 per cent of which have been formed during the last thirty years (O’Brien et al 1999; Edwards et al 1999). This form of governance is messy and unpredictable, but ultimately it will be more effective - by giving ordinary citizens a bigger say in the questions that dominate world politics and a greater stake in the solutions.

Currently, civil-society involvement in global regimes tends to operate through networks of interest groups (especially NGOs), rather than through formal representative structures (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Higgott and Bieler 1999). This raises important questions about civic groups and their future role, especially issues of structure, governance and accountability that may erode their legitimacy as social actors in the emerging global order. As I show later in this paper, it is precisely in this area that commentators are raising increasingly critical questions. However, the role of civil society is certain to grow as global governance becomes more pluralistic and less confined to state-based systems defined according to territorial sovereignty.

c) “It’s good for business.”

In addition to these conceptual arguments, The United Nations agencies and the International Financial Institutions have become more interested in civil society, and more open to working with civic groups, for a simpler and more commercial reason - it is “good for business.” International institutions have found that operational partnerships and a broader policy dialogue contribute to more efficient project implementation and a lower rate of failure; a better public image and more political support, especially among key shareholder governments in North America and Western Europe; and research and policy-development which is more informed and less constrained by internal orthodoxy. Given these tangible benefits, it would be difficult for any international agency to retreat from the trend towards greater civic engagement; the practical and political costs would be too high.

This positive assessment is a comparatively recent phenomenon. Prior to 1980, there was little structured contact between civic groups and multilateral institutions, and almost no formal non-state involvement in global regimes. Toward the middle of the 1980s such contacts became more frequent and more organized, including the consolidation of NGO advisory or consultative bodies for the specialized agencies of the UN system, the formation of the NGO Working Group on the World Bank in 1984, and some early global campaigning efforts around debt,

structural adjustment, and popular participation. (Willets 1996; Weiss and Gordenker 1996; Fox and Brown 1998). Global civic organizing increased at a much faster rate after the end of the Cold War, with the number of international NGOs quadrupling to over 20,000 in less than two decades and other civic actors (such international labor union federations and networks of professional associations) beginning to take a higher profile (Runyan 1999). Successive UN conferences on gender, population, the environment, social development and habitat provided a vehicle for these emerging civic alliances to test out their skills, and both the UN and the World Bank began to form strategic partnerships with key NGOs in ventures such as the Global Alliance for Forest Conservation and Sustainable Use and the World Commission on Dams. The assumption underlying these partnerships is that “global civil society” can broaden democratic practice by creating additional channels for popular participation, accountability, consultation and debate, thus improving the quality of governance and promoting agreements that will last. The World Bank, UNDP and many bilateral aid agencies have embarked on a systematic effort to increase their understanding of civil society and its role in these contexts, and to enhance their capacity to engage effectively with civic groups at both the national level - through planning processes such as the World Bank’s “Comprehensive Development Framework” – and the international level.

However, towards the end of the 1990s, critical questions began to be raised about this phenomenon from inside the international institutions, especially about the role of intermediary (advocacy) NGOs as a sub-set of civic actors. Having portrayed civil society in earlier times as something of a “magic bullet” for state and market failure, it is not surprising that attention is now turning to the failings (actual or perceived) of civil society itself. It is increasingly common to hear senior agency staff, academics and journalists echo the complaints of some governments (especially in the South), that NGOs are self-selected, unaccountable, and poorly rooted in society, thereby questioning their legitimacy as participants in global debates. It is not that the principle of civic engagement is being questioned; more that the practice of civic engagement may be distorted in favor of organizations with greater resources and more access to decision-makers in capital cities – perhaps marginalizing grassroots constituencies in the process. Current trends in the UN system illustrate this ambiguity of commitment: strong declarations from the Secretary-General and others about the importance of civic engagement, accompanied by increasing attempts to formalize – some would say restrict - access by NGOs to the formal machinery of debate and decision making, especially in New York (UN 1998; Rosenau 1998; Paul 1999). At the turn of the millennium therefore, there are forces acting both for and against the deepening of civil society involvement in global regimes. The dilemmas created by this situation provide a useful agenda for dialogue and action-planning among civic groups and inter-governmental organizations over the coming years.

### **3. From rhetoric to reality: the dilemmas of non-state involvement in global governance.**

As a result of the political openings of the last decade, civic groups increasingly feel that they have the *right* to participate in global governance. Much less attention has been paid to their

*obligations* in pursuing this role responsibly, or to concrete ways in which these rights might be expressed in the conduct of international institutions and the governance of global regimes. This is sensitive and difficult ground for both governments and civil society. There are at least four areas of tension:

a) *Legitimacy, accountability and representation.*

The first set of issues – and by far the most contentious – concern legitimacy and accountability: who speaks for whom in an NGO alliance or network, and how are differences resolved when participants vary in strength and resources? Who enjoys the benefits and suffers the costs of what the movement achieves, especially at the grassroots level? Whose voice is heard, and which interests are ignored, when differences are filtered out in order to communicate a simple message in a global campaign? In particular, how are grassroots voices mediated by institutions of different kinds – networks and their members, Northern NGOs and Southern NGOs, Southern NGOs and community groups, and so on down the line?

In the mid-1990s, North American NGOs claimed to represent a Southern consensus against the replenishment of the International Development Association (the soft loan arm of the World Bank), on the grounds that social and environmental safeguards were too weak. In contrast, Southern NGOs (mainly from Africa) insisted that IDA go ahead regardless of the weakness of these safeguards, because foreign aid was desperately needed even if its terms were imperfect. (Cleary 1995, Nelson 1996, Edwards et al 1999). The “banana wars” of 1998-99 provide a more recent example of this problem, where NGOs supporting small-scale banana producers in Central America and the Caribbean found themselves on opposite sides of a landmark dispute before the World Trade Organisation. On some issues (like debt or land mines), there is a solid South-North consensus in favor of a unified lobbying position. However, in other areas (especially trade and labor rights, and the environment), there is no such consensus, since people and their civic representatives may have conflicting short-term interests in different parts of the world. As globalization proceeds, these areas will become the centerpiece of the international system’s response, so it is vital that NGO networks develop a more sophisticated way of addressing differences of opinion within civil society in different localities and regions. Very few networks have mechanisms in place to resolve such differences democratically (Covey 1995).

In cases like these, discussions often focus on the thorny issue of representation, though there are really two questions that are being asked: first, is representation the only route to NGO legitimacy in global governance? Second, how “representative” must an organization be in order to qualify for a seat at the negotiating table? These questions are often conflated, with results that make sensible conversation about policy options impossible.

Legitimacy is generally understood as the right to be and do something in society - a sense that an organization is lawful, admissible and justified in its chosen course of action, but there are different ways in which these things can be validated. Legitimacy in membership bodies is claimed through the normal democratic processes of elections and formal sanctions that ensure

that an agency is representative of and accountable to its constituents. Trade unions and some NGO federations fall into this category, though whether these processes operate effectively and democratically is another matter. Agreeing on some minimum standards in this regard is an important part of the agenda for the future. A small number of intermediary NGOs also have a membership base of this kind (Amnesty International is a good example), but most do not, and very few international NGO networks have democratic systems of governance or accountability. This creates obvious problems in claiming legitimacy through representation, which are exacerbated by the financial gains that come from serving as a trusted intermediary for donors who want to fund NGO advocacy, but cannot make grants directly to every participant. This sets up an unhealthy dynamic since NGOs in Washington DC, London or Brussels have a vested interest in maintaining the role of intermediary, rather than encouraging NGOs to represent themselves directly, especially those based in the South. The financial implications of losing this precious status are one reason why criticisms of legitimacy touch off such a fierce reaction among Northern NGOs, this being one of the rawest of NGO raw nerves.

In their defence, intermediary NGOs do not need democratic ways of sustaining their legitimacy, since their legitimacy is defined by legal compliance, effective oversight by their trustees, and recognition by other legitimate bodies that they have valuable knowledge and skills to bring to the debate. Since global governance is inevitably going to be a combination of formal and informal political processes, it is perfectly possible for NGOs to be legitimate but not representative participants in global debates, so long as they are clear on the implications of the different ways in which legitimacy is claimed. No one expects Oxfam, for example, to be perfectly representative of Third-World opinion; only that its proposals on debt and other issues should be solidly rooted in research and experience, and sensitive to the views and aspirations of its Third-World partners. However, even if Oxfam conforms to these conditions (which is a challenge in itself), this gives them no formal rights to participate in global decision-making, since this is an area in which legitimacy must be claimed through representation. Non-membership bodies may have the right to a voice, but not to a vote. In this sense, the best representative of civil society is a democratically elected government, complemented by the checks and balances provided by non-state membership bodies (such as labor unions), and pressure groups of different kinds. This resulting mix will be very messy, but it is standard practice in national politics and looks set to shape the emergence of more democratic regimes at the global level too. The world will never be perfectly democratic, but it can be increasingly pluralist, and if that pluralism allows all interests to be represented and debated then a better set of decisions will emerge over time.

It is no accident that questions about legitimacy are being raised at a time when NGOs have started to gain real influence on the international stage. In that sense they are victims of their own success. Neither is there any shortage of hypocrisy among the critics, especially when it appears that NGOs are being singled out in contrast to businesses (and even many governments) that are even less accountable than they are. Nevertheless, the criticisms are real, and must be addressed if NGOs are to exploit the political space that has opened up in the post Cold-War world. At the minimum, that means no more unsubstantiated claims to “represent the people”, and more concerted and creative efforts to change the balance of power in global civic alliances.

This will always be difficult, but when different routes to legitimacy are confused then the issues are impossible to resolve in any sensible way.

*b) NGOs: from the local to the global.*

Globalisation requires both governments and NGOs to link different levels of their activity together - local, national, regional and global. For governments this challenge is somewhat more straightforward, since they have a chain of inter-governmental structures like the United Nations through which debate and decision-making can be linked, at least in theory. The situation is much more challenging for NGOs, since there are no parallel structures to facilitate supra-national civic participation, and no civic representation in inter-governmental bodies.

All around the world, governments, NGOs and business are already experimenting with “dialogic politics” at the local level, sharing in planning and decision-making to generate a better and more sustainable set of outcomes. These experiments are the local building blocks of future global governance. By laying a strong foundation for negotiations over labor standards, environmental pollution and human rights, they offer the potential to connect ordinary citizens to global regimes. But this can only work if local structures are connected to more democratic structures at higher levels of the world system, which can ensure that sacrifices made in one locality are not exploited by less scrupulous counterparts elsewhere. Recent tri-partite agreements on child labor in Bangladeshi garment factories are a sign of the future in this respect, with NGOs, government and business striking mutually advantageous local bargains within a framework of global minimum standards set out in the provisions of the ILO Convention. Other regimes could follow this example by embedding local agreements in a nested system of authorities that balance necessary flexibility with a core of universal principles. Getting things right at the base of the system is much more important than introducing new global institutions that are divorced from their local roots – an exercise akin to building castles in the sky. Until such linkages become the norm, NGOs will continue to struggle to make connections between their work at the local and the global levels.

These problems are not helped by a tendency among some NGOs to focus on global advocacy to the exclusion of the national-level processes of state-society relations that underpin the ability of any country to pursue progressive goals in an integrated economy. There is always a temptation to “leap-frog” the national arena and go direct to Washington or Brussels, where it is often easier to gain access to senior officials, and achieve a response. This is understandable, but in the long term it is a serious mistake. It increases the influence of multilateral institutions over national development and erodes the process of domestic coalition building that is essential to the development of pro-poor policy reform. In addition, the constant appearance of NGOs in international fora, combined with the dominance of NGO voices from the North, reinforces the suspicion among Third-World governments that these are not genuine global alliances but yet another example of the rich world’s monopoly over global debates. The NGOs concerned may see themselves as defending the interests of the poor, but it is still outsiders – not the government’s own constituents - who are deciding the agenda. Most of these attacks are self-serving, but the asymmetry of NGO networks makes such criticisms inevitable. For example,

only 251 of the 1,550 NGOs associated with the UN Department of Public Information come from the South, and the ratio of NGOs in consultative status with ECOSOC is even lower (Kendig 1999).

Addressing this problem requires a different way of building NGO alliances, with more emphasis on horizontal relationships among equals; stronger links between local, national and global action; and a more democratic way of deciding on strategy and messages. Jubilee 2000 (though a relatively easy case because of the absence of any South-North NGO fault-line) provides some good examples of these innovations. In Uganda for example, a network of local NGOs has developed a dialogue with their own government on the options for debt relief, supported with technical assistance from Northern NGOs like Oxfam. The results of this dialogue were then incorporated into the international debt campaign. Research has shown that NGO networks can achieve their policy goals, build capacity among NGOs in the South, *and* preserve accountability to grassroots constituents, if they consciously plan to do so from the outset and are prepared to trade-off some element of speed and convenience in order to negotiate a more democratic set of outcomes (Covey, 1995; Fox and Brown, 1998; Edwards and Gaventa 2000). Sadly, relatively few Northern NGOs seem willing to follow this approach, though to their credit NGOs such as Oxfam and ActionAid have started to re-orient some of their resources in this direction – as with the Uganda Debt Network cited earlier. Perhaps the costs seem too high, in terms of profile lost and decision-making made more complex. As we shall see, governments can help NGOs to deal with these costs and encourage them to make the transition to alliances which are less dominated by voices in the North.

*c) From campaign slogans to constituencies for change.*

One of the consequences of globalization is that traditional answers to social and economic questions become redundant, or at least that the questions become more complex and the answers more uncertain. The theoretical underpinnings of pro- and anti free-trade positions, for example, are highly contested. We cannot know in advance whether one course of action will be better than another, whatever the theory predicts. But this is far from a theoretical question: what if the NGOs who protested so loudly in Seattle turn out to be wrong in their assumptions about the future benefits that flow from different trading strategies? Returning to the issue of accountability, who pays the price? Not the NGOs themselves, but the farmers in the Third World who will be suffering the consequences for generations. The same strictures apply to pro free-traders too of course, but NGOs cannot use this as a defence. All protagonists must face up to the same question: in an uncertain world, what does it mean to advocate responsibly for a predetermined position?

Humility would be a start, which is a challenge in itself to organisations used to occupying the moral high ground. More investment in research and learning is also crucial, so that the alternatives NGOs are lobbying for can be properly grounded, tested, and critiqued. NGOs are adept at saying ‘no, this is wrong’, but not so good at saying ‘yes, here is a viable alternative.’ Yet a politics of pure opposition is unlikely to contribute very much to the regimes of the future. One of the consequences of this dilemma is likely to be a switch from “conversion” strategies



(the traditional NGO view of advocacy) to “engagement” strategies, which aim to support a process of dialogue rather than simply lobbying for a fixed set of outcomes. This will take NGOs further into territory that may seem obvious ground - building public constituencies for policy reform – but which has been largely absent from their agenda.

A strong constituency in the industrialised world is a pre-requisite for the success of more equitable global regimes, new forms of governance, and the sacrifices required to alter global patterns of consumption and trade. Codes of conduct to govern multi-national corporations, for example, are of little use unless they are backed by large-scale consumer pressure to enforce them. Although governments and business can play an important role in building these constituencies, the major responsibility is likely to fall to NGOs, since it is they who have the public trust and international connections to talk plainly and convincingly about global justice. NGOs have always talked of the need to build constituencies, but have focused on problems in the Third World instead of lifestyle change at home, playing on the line that “your five dollars will make the difference.” It rarely does, and what would make a difference (like mass-based public protest against Western indifference) - is never given sufficient attention. Many NGOs have cut back their public education budgets in recent years (seeing this an overhead instead of a core activity), while government spending is only slowly re-surfacing after the insularity of the Thatcher/Reagan years. A deeper engagement in constituency building does not mean abandoning campaigns or surrendering the power of protest. But it does mean a better balance between traditional forms of NGO advocacy, and slower, longer-term work on the causes of injustice. To support this shift, NGOs will need to develop a range of new skills and competencies in public communications, and work with academics, think tanks, trade unions and others who can help them to develop and articulate more nuanced positions on issues like trade and labour markets, adapted to different country contexts.

#### **4. Ways Forward: what role for the United Nations?**

Civil society involvement in global governance cannot be legislated into existence or imposed from above. Nevertheless, the United Nations has a crucial role to play in nurturing this historic shift, both as “midwife” and as “host” – in making sure that its own structures and mechanisms are open to participation and serve as role models for the rest of the international community. This is far from the case at present. Since many of the questions laid out above concern dilemmas of governance and accountability, the United Nations – as the body charged with negotiating and monitoring global standards - has a special responsibility to lead in this field. In its role as “midwife”, there are plenty of avenues for action.

First, civic groups, governments and business need a “safe space” in which to exchange ideas about the practicalities of global governance, and the implications for the different actors involved (“safe” meaning a forum free from the accusations and counter-accusations that often dominate the dialogue). A large amount of thinking and research is going on about new experiments in global public policy, but it is fragmented and poorly disseminated, especially among civic groups themselves. The UN is generally a more trusted convenor than the International Financial Institutions or the World Trade Organization, and is well placed to host

substantive discussions of this kind in the run up to the Millennium General Assembly. As far as possible, such discussions should be based on careful analysis of innovative practice (like the Commission on Sustainable Development), not discussions of general principles. Civic groups need more support (and less uninformed criticism) in developing concrete new approaches to governance, accountability and communications in global networks.

Second, the UN can help to support concrete innovations in global civil society in three crucial areas.

- leveling the playing field for civic involvement, so as to encourage participation by the broadest possible range of organizations, especially from the South. This will mean additional support for Southern groups to develop new capacities and skills, and to travel to global forums (perhaps as members of national delegations); restrictions on the number of Northern groups at the negotiating table (by country, region and sector); and decentralized mechanisms that re-locate the center of gravity away from New York and Washington DC.
- a greater degree of structure and order to the “rules of the game” that govern civic involvement in global debates, without imposing bureaucratic rules from the top down, since that would damage the creativity and spontaneity that characterizes the best of global citizen action. Codes of conduct provide a useful way forward here, set and policed by NGOs themselves. The ‘Guidelines for NGO participation in the CSD Steering Committee’ provide a good example, setting high standards for transparency, accountability, representation and behavior that result in sanctions if NGOs fail to observe them. APEC’s “legitimacy determinants” provide another – a way of selecting NGOs on the basis of the degree of “helpful knowledge” they bring to the discussions. At present, these rules vary widely and unnecessarily, given that most inter-governmental organizations face common dilemmas. There are other ways of clarifying the rights and responsibilities of access and participation - like an independent ombudsman to arbitrate in disputes between civic groups and inter-governmental organizations, or between NGOs in a network who may feel aggrieved. Humanitarian relief agencies, for example, look set to introduce such a mechanism voluntarily after a period of intensive debate (Mitchell and Doane 1999). However, such formal mechanisms may not be welcomed very widely, and may be of limited use in practice: the World Bank’s Inspection Panel has had relatively little success in institutionalizing accountability, though it is certainly an advance on what went before.
- a voice not a vote for civic groups in global governance. NGOs must recognize that there are justifiable limits to their participation in decision-making, set by their (mostly) non-representative character and the legitimacy of democratically elected governments. The key to civil society involvement lies through a structured voice in global debates, not through a formal vote in the Security Council. The challenge will be to structure this voice in ways that promote a genuine sense of equality and democracy in global civil society itself.

Third, the UN can play an important role in promoting greater rigor in the debate, in place of the anecdotes, prejudice and confusion that currently predominate. This applies especially to the

vexed questions of legitimacy and representation, where general statements are often applied across the board to radically different types of organization, forms of participation, issues and requirements. This obscures the discussion of practical alternatives, and renders governments and inter-governmental organizations vulnerable to the charge that they are using the difficulties of practice to frustrate progress on points of principle. There are a number of critical test cases in the near future that can be used to experiment more creatively with the principles laid out above, especially the Millennium General Assembly in 2000 and the follow-up conferences to Beijing, Copenhagen and Rio de Janeiro. The UN must lead this process.

## **5. Conclusion.**

Whatever the remaining problems of legitimacy and accountability, structure and relationships, one thing is certain: at the aggregate level, the increasing involvement of civil society in global policy debates in the last ten years has been a significant force for good. The land mines campaign, Jubilee 2000, the women's and environmental movements and many others have secured real advances for people on the margins of global progress. NGOs are rarely angelic in their behavior, but generally speaking they are on the side of the angels, and the world is a better place for them.

At the start of a new century, civil society and inter-governmental organizations have reached an historic moment in their relationship with each other. The old antagonisms have largely disappeared, to be replaced by a more complex picture in which there are no easy answers and few issues that generate an immediate consensus. Greater openness to civic involvement in global regimes brings increased responsibilities to play that role effectively, sensitively, and in ways which genuinely give voice to the poor. This is a challenge to all civic groups, and to all governments – without whose active support it will be impossible to consolidate the gains of the recent past. For their part, inter-governmental organizations must be supportive of civic efforts to grapple with this new agenda, and committed to meeting their side of the bargain in opening the regimes of the future to global citizen action.

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## Notes

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<sup>2</sup> Civil society is a contentious term with no common or consensus definition. The definition I prefer is as follows: "civil society is the arena in which people come together to advance the interests they hold in common, not for profit or political power, but because they care enough about something to take collective action. It includes all networks and associations between family and state, except firms."