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## **The Future of NGO Participation at the United Nations after the 2005 World Summit**

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Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) have acquired considerable importance at the UN since the beginning of the 1990s. Yet attempts made since the last review of the consultative arrangements between the UN and NGOs, in 1996, to reform NGOs' formal opportunities for participation, have been unsuccessful. The recommendations made by the Cardoso-Panel on the future of UN-civil society relations played no apparent part in debates on UN reform in 2005. Instead, governments sent out the opposite signal during the Millennium+5 Summit preparatory process. In contrast to their practice at the UN Conferences of the 1990s, or the ECOSOC meetings and the meetings of its Functional Commissions, in 2005 governments largely excluded NGOs both from preparations for the Summit and from the Summit itself.

What does this mean for the future participation of NGOs in the UN? What reform proposals have been put up for negotiation, where are governments most resistant, and where does political progress appear possible? And finally, what concrete conclusions for the further UN reform process can be drawn from this discussion?

## 1 The status quo of NGO participation at the UN

The legal basis for NGO participation at the United Nations is Article 71 of the UN Charter. This allows ECOSOC to entertain consultative relationships with NGOs. The details of the currently valid participation rights are set out in an ECOSOC resolution passed in 1996.<sup>1</sup> The resolution envisages far-reaching participatory opportunities for national and international NGOs within ECOSOC and its Functional Commissions, such as the Human Rights Commission and the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD). The resolution also details the participation of NGOs at international UN conferences.

By contrast, the other main UN bodies, particularly the General Assembly and the Security Council, have no formal or legal framework for NGO participation. In practice, however, the General Assembly has opened up to NGOs in recent years, for example with the “+5 Special Sessions” and the informal Civil Society Hearings in the run-up to the 2005 World Summit. Even in the Security Council, a protocol trick (the so-called Arria Formula<sup>2</sup>) enabled individual consultations with NGOs to take place. These happened outside Security Council premises and did not appear on the official Council agenda. For many NGOs, these opportunities to participate are not sufficient. They demand amongst other things that participatory rules similar to those of the ECOSOC should also be adopted by the General Assembly.

Partly as a result of the 1996 revision of the rules on participation, the number of NGOs with consultative status at ECOSOC has risen considerably. In 1992 there were 714 NGOs with General, Special or Roster Status at ECOSOC, in 2005 there were 2613. With reference to this, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan spoke of an explosive growth in NGO participation, as a result of which the system was “showing signs of strain”.<sup>3</sup> This was mainly because the United Nations had not adapted its working practices and secretariat structure appropriately to the changes of the preceding years. The responsibility for engaging with NGOs within the UN Secretariat has been unclear, the accreditation processes bureaucratic and tedious and the infra-

structure and financial support for NGOs entirely insufficient. As a result of all this, NGOs from the South have been consistently under-represented at UN meetings and conferences.

## 2 The Cardoso Panel Report

In response to the increasing number and growing importance of civil society organisations at the United Nations, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan set up a panel of experts in spring 2003 which was to formulate proposals for the future organisation of relations between the UN and civil society. He appointed the former Brazilian President, Fernando Cardoso, as Chair of the panel. The panel presented its report in June 2004, under the title “We the peoples: civil society, the United Nations and global governance”.<sup>4</sup>

The report contains a series of useful proposals on simplifying the accreditation process, on financial support for participation of NGOs from developing countries and on strengthening the Security Council’s engagement with NGOs. In other central questions, such as the opening up of the General Assembly to NGOs, the report is vague and hardly moves beyond the status quo.

The principle problem with the report, however, is that it does not limit itself to examining the relationship between the UN and civil society, as the title suggests. Instead, it focuses on “partnerships” between government, the business sector and civil society, describing all of these groups as “constituencies” of the UN. Introducing the term “constituencies” adds to the already confusing hotchpotch of jargon which plagues the UN, where even terms such as “NGOs”, “civil society”, “the business sector” and “stakeholders” are still not used uniformly.<sup>5</sup> It also shifts the attention away from UN-civil society relations and towards “multi-stakeholder” or “multi-constituency” approaches. The report’s recommendations explicitly aim for a reinforcement of the business sector within the UN. The consequence of this would be a shift in

<sup>1</sup> ECOSOC Res. 1996/31, 25<sup>th</sup> of July 1996 (Consultative relations between the United Nations and non-governmental organizations).

<sup>2</sup> See James Paul (2003): The Arria Formula. New York: GPF (<http://www.globalpolicy.org/security/mtgsetc/arria.htm>).

<sup>3</sup> See UN Doc. A/57/387, 9<sup>th</sup> of September 2002, para. 139.

<sup>4</sup> See Panel of Eminent Persons on United Nations–Civil Society Relations (2004) (“Cardoso Report”).

<sup>5</sup> The Cardoso Panel defines the term “Constituency” as follows: “Constituency: Comprises three broad sectors: civil society, the private sector and the State. Central Governments are the Member States of the United Nations, collectively constituting its membership. Others actors are of growing importance to the deliberative processes, operations and communications of the United Nations. The Panel suggests that the United Nations view these actors as constituencies, or stakeholders, of the Organization’s processes.” See Cardoso Report, Glossary.

power relations, in some cases leading to an actual weakening of NGO participation at the UN, as the Cardoso Panel indirectly encourages shifting financial resources away from straight NGO forums:

*"The Secretariat should foster multi-constituency processes as new conduits for discussion of United Nations priorities, redirecting resources now used for single-constituency forums covering multiple issues".<sup>6</sup>*

Reactions to the Cardoso Report were cautious. Most NGOs either simply did not acknowledge the Report or else made a point of disregarding it. A few expressed disappointment with the vague proposals around extending participatory rights to the General Assembly. Others explicitly criticised the fact that the Panel had not stuck to examining UN-civil society relations but had instead actively advocated greater involvement of the business sector.

Governments, too, reacted hesitantly to the Cardoso Report. To date no government has published any in-depth statement on the proposals. In the General Assembly debate on the Report in October 2004, it became clear that many countries (including China, Egypt and Cuba) simply rejected any extension of NGO participatory rights. But even traditional supporters of stronger NGO participation, such as certain EU countries, were reticent in their support for the Cardoso Report.<sup>7</sup> The President of the General Assembly summarised the feeling among member-states as follows:

*"Regarding relations between the United Nations and civil society contained in the Cardoso report, it was recognized that the contributions of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are important for the work of the United Nations. However, it is clear from discussions that the modalities for their participation and their contribution to the work of the General Assembly still need to be considered. Several delegations advocated a simplification of the system of accreditation for representatives of civil society. A large number of delegations welcomed the existing cooperation on the local level between Governments and civil society on development issues. The hope was expressed that this cooperation*

*would also be strengthened with the United Nations. However, several delegations advocated limiting such cooperation to the level of the Economic and Social Council".<sup>8</sup>*

Several attempts by the Brazilian government to pass a resolution on the Cardoso Report's recommendations failed.<sup>9</sup> Since then, the whole process has been treading water. The role of civil society has not even been an issue in the debate on UN reform in 2005, despite Kofi Annan repeatedly taking up some of the Cardoso Panel's recommendations in his own reports.

### 3 Kofi Annan's response to the Cardoso Report

In response to the Cardoso Report, the UN Secretary-General published a report in September 2004, in which he formulated proposals for improving relations between the UN and NGOs.<sup>10</sup> Remarkably, in this report he concentrated on the relationship between the UN and NGOs in the narrower sense, and did not adopt the Cardoso Report's broader "multi-constituency" concept and corresponding recommendations. This was undoubtedly at least partly in response to the criticism expressed by NGOs and governments.

Annan's report contains a set of pragmatic suggestions on how to develop UN-NGO relations further, including:

- Establishing a trust fund to support financially the participation of representatives of NGOs from developing countries at UN events;
- Simplifying the NGO accreditation process;
- Formulating a code of conduct for NGOs, "as one instrument to ensure that NGOs commit themselves to the aims of the Charter and act in a manner that reflects the intergovernmental character of the Organization";<sup>11</sup>
- Improving country-level engagement by UN representatives with NGOs;
- Establishing a "Partnership Office" in the UN Secretariat and integrating the UN-Non-Governmental Liaison Service (NGLS), up to now independent, into this office;

<sup>6</sup> Cardoso Report, Proposal 5. For an evaluation of the Cardoso Report see also the more extensive comments by Martens, Jens/Paul, James (2004): Comments on the Report of the Cardoso Panel. New York: GPF (<http://www.globalpolicy.org/reform/initiatives/panels/cardoso/08gpf.pdf>).

<sup>7</sup> See statements made by Governments, UN Doc. GA/10268, 4<sup>th</sup> of October and UN Doc. GA/10270, 5<sup>th</sup> of October 2005.

<sup>8</sup> UN Doc. A/59/PV.20, 5<sup>th</sup> of October 2005, p. 18.

<sup>9</sup> See Brazilian Draft Resolution to the General Assembly on United Nations-Civil Society Relations, 16<sup>th</sup> of February 2005 (<http://www.globalpolicy.org/ngos/int/un/access/2005/0216brazildraft.htm>).

<sup>10</sup> See United Nations Secretary-General (2004).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 34.

- Holding interactive hearings between Member States and NGO representatives prior to major events, as well as prior to the opening of the General Assembly each year;
- Formally opening the General Assembly to NGO participation.

Kofi Annan especially emphasised the last proposal, and objected explicitly to the argument that Article 71 of the UN Charter enabled NGO participation in ECOSOC only. He also stressed that formal accreditation to the General Assembly would require a clear definition of rights and responsibilities of NGOs.

*"There is nothing in Article 71 that would preclude the General Assembly from inviting NGOs to participate in its sessions and its work. There is considerable merit in opening the regular work of the General Assembly to increased participation by accredited NGOs. This is already taking place informally through panels, round-tables, NGO involvement in the preparatory work of the international conferences, the Special Sessions and high-level dialogue of the Assembly. One possible option could be to start with accreditation to the Main Committees, leaving for consideration at a later stage whether accreditation to the plenary should be considered. If the Assembly decides in favour of accrediting NGOs to the General Assembly's Main Committees, rights and responsibilities of participation would then need to be defined".<sup>12</sup>*

Opening the General Assembly to NGOs was the only proposal that Kofi Annan "carried over" to 2005, and which resurfaced in his report "In Larger Freedom". In this report he encouraged the General Assembly to establish mechanisms "enabling it to engage fully and systematically with civil society".<sup>13</sup>

Again, in the debate on Kofi Annan's reform proposals, governments reacted extremely cautiously to this suggestion. Venezuela appointed itself as spokesperson for those in opposition to stronger NGO representation in the General Assembly, with the Venezuelan Representative to the UN protesting that *"a green light had been given to flood the Assembly with non-governmental organizations of all types, including those that were most representative of the empire, in the name of a vague and unrepresentative civil society"*.<sup>14</sup>

This attitude is by no means unique, as was demonstrated in the preparatory process for the

Millennium Summit, from which civil society was more or less excluded.

#### **4 Setback or historic event? NGO participation at the 2005 World Summit**

The 2005 World Summit was held as a General Assembly "high-level plenary meeting". This meant that the Summit was subject to the General Assembly Rules of Procedures, which fundamentally foreclose any NGO participation. This decision was taken quite consciously by governments despite a number of other available alternatives. For example, the Millennium+5 Summit could have been held as a Special Session of the General Assembly, comparable to the Rio+5 and Copenhagen+5 Special Sessions in 1997 and 2000 respectively. At both these conferences, NGOs were actively involved.

The Secretary-General officially gave security and capacity concerns as the reason for excluding NGOs, noting that *"For security reasons and the space limitations in the United Nations building, the broader participation of civil society is unfortunately not possible"*.<sup>15</sup>

Yet NGOs were not just excluded from the Summit itself but also from most of the preparatory process. The greater part of the Summit preparations happened within the framework of informal consultations behind closed doors. Early on, NGOs criticised the lack of transparency and opportunities to participate in a letter to the UN Secretary-General. They identified this lack as a serious set-back compared to the world conferences of the 1990s, and demanded that the preparatory process be opened up and that NGOs be allowed greater participation at the Summit itself.<sup>16</sup> Their intervention was unsuccessful.

Civil Society participation was limited to 2-day informal General Assembly Hearings in June 2005, with business and NGO representatives. 230 representatives, of NGOs with consultative status at ECOSOC, of other civil society organisations and of the business sector, took part as so-called "active participants".<sup>17</sup> They were selected from a list of around 1000 applicants by the President of the General Assembly on the recommendations of an NGO Task Force. The 10-person Task Force, comprising mainly representatives of New York-based NGO networks, was

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., para. 25.

<sup>13</sup> United Nations Secretary-General (2005), para. 162

<sup>14</sup> UN Doc. GA/10339, 8<sup>th</sup> of April 2005.

<sup>15</sup> UN Doc. A/59/545, 1<sup>st</sup> of November 2004, para. 21.

<sup>16</sup> See <http://www.globalpolicy.org/ngos/ngo-un/ga/2004/1112letter.htm>.

<sup>17</sup> For further details, see the Report of the President of the General Assembly on the Hearings: UN Doc. A/60/331, 2<sup>nd</sup> of September 2005.

set up by the President of the General Assembly in consultation with NGLS.

The Hearings took place relatively late on in the Summit's preparatory process and had no demonstrable effect on the Summit's outcome. Rather, they had a symbolic character, and were apparently designed above all to prove the openness of governments and the UN towards non-state actors. Nevertheless, they were celebrated by some NGOs and UN spokespeople as a "historic event".<sup>18</sup> It is true that they represented the first event of that kind within the General Assembly. However, within other contexts, the United Nations had in previous years already held Hearings and interactive dialogues with NGOs and business, for example the Hearings on Financing for Development in 2000 and the interactive dialogue events at the Monterrey Conference and the Johannesburg Summit in 2002. So the 2005 Hearings did not *de facto* set a precedent.

At the World Summit from the 14<sup>th</sup> to the 16<sup>th</sup> of September 2005 and in the preceding General Assembly Meeting on Financing for Development, only three representatives of NGOs and Trade Unions, as well as 2 business representatives, were allowed to take part and deliver a statement. Entry to the UN building was denied to all others because of "security concerns". The three speakers at the Summit itself were only able to make their statements late on the evening of the 16<sup>th</sup> of September 2005, after the Final Outcome Document had been passed and after most of the government representatives had already left the room.<sup>19</sup>

In the light of these rather telling facts and of the large-scale exclusion of NGOs, the 2005 World Summit seems to mark less a "historic event" than a low point in relations between the UN and civil society. Against this background, it is unsurprising that the Summit's Outcome Document does little more than touch on the relationship between the UN and NGOs.

## 5 The role of civil society in the World Summit Outcome Document

In the 2005 World Summit Outcome Document, governments formulated declarations of intent on the following four thematic areas:<sup>20</sup>

- Development
- Peace and collective security
- Human rights and the rule of law

- Strengthening the United Nations.

They refer to the role of NGOs and civil society in the sections on Development and on Strengthening the UN. In both cases the private sector is referred to in the same breath. Under the title "Global Partnerships for Development" governments reaffirm amongst other things that they will "*enhance the contribution of non-governmental organizations, civil society, the private sector and other stakeholders in national development efforts, as well as in the promotion of the global partnership for development*".<sup>21</sup>

In the section on the future role of ECOSOC, they note that "*the Council should serve as a quality platform for high-level engagement among Member States and with the international financial institutions, the private sector and civil society on emerging global trends, policies and action [...]*".<sup>22</sup>

The governments explicitly address the role of non-state actors at the end of the Outcome Document. Here they state:

*"We welcome the positive contributions of the private sector and civil society, including non-governmental organizations, in the promotion and implementation of development and human rights programmes and stress the importance of their continued engagement with Governments, the United Nations and other international organizations in these key areas"*.<sup>23</sup>

Further, they

*"welcome the dialogue between those organizations and Member States, as reflected in the first informal interactive hearings of the General Assembly with representatives of non-governmental organizations, civil society and the private sector"*.<sup>24</sup>

With these sentences, governments simply confirm the current status of relations between the UN and civil society, and do not open up any new perspectives for developing these relations further.

However, the passages of the Outcome Document which explicitly mention NGOs are not the only parts relevant to the future role of NGOs at the UN. It is important also to note the parts in which NGOs are quite explicitly not mentioned. This is the case particularly for the planned Peacebuilding Commission and the new Human Rights Council, on which detailed negotiations only began after the World Summit. There is a

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., para. 8

<sup>19</sup> For further information, see the UN NGLS Roundup Issue 124 (October 2005).

<sup>20</sup> See United Nations General Assembly (2005)

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., para 22(e)

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., para. 155(a)

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., para.172

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., para. 173

danger that within the course of these negotiations, existing NGO participatory rights, especially in the area of Human Rights, might be cut back.

## 6 Conclusion

Having experienced dynamic developments in the 1990s, relations between the United Nations and NGOs are now at a critical stage. All attempts to extend formal participatory rights for NGOs so far have failed. Some governments have reacted rather defensively to the increasing (quantitative) presence of non-state actors in the UN, warning against the "flooding" of the World Organisation with NGOs. But even governments who have traditionally been more open to NGO demands have held back in the current reform debates on the issue. They evidently fear that the negotiations on reform, already difficult, might become even more complicated if NGOs were involved, and would like to avoid opening up yet another reform debate to add to those already raging round the Security Council, the Human Rights Council, the Peacebuilding Commission, ECOSOC and the UN Secretariat.

Given the impasse over further participatory rights, increasing numbers of governments, UN institutions and even some NGOs favour a more informal form of co-operation within the framework of multi-stakeholder initiatives and "partnerships" between public and private actors. The new Global Compact Governance Structure endorsed by the Secretary-General in August 2005 could set a precedent for such work.<sup>25</sup>

In the light of these trends and of the experience of the NGO participation at the 2005 World Summit, the following gloomy scenario appears plausible for the future relations between the UN and NGOs: On the one side, inter-governmental negotiations and decision-making processes will shift away from World Conferences and Special Sessions of the General Assembly with active NGO participation, and towards basically "NGO-free" spaces, such as informal consultations of the General Assembly. On the other side, multi-stakeholder initiatives, involving only selected NGOs which have demonstrated their willingness to enter into dialogue and co-operation with governments and business, will gain increasing importance.

Such developments towards more limited and exclusive NGO involvement could prove fatal for public support of the UN. Many civil society organisations can be expected to react to these tendencies by distancing themselves from the UN. Following the IMF, the World Bank and the WTO, the UN would also find itself more firmly in the firing range of the anti-globalisation movement.

Yet the UN is in desperate need of greater public support, especially in the light of the continuing political attacks by the USA. Transparency and openness in its decision-making processes and a greater involvement of civil society organisations are crucial pre-conditions for this support, and would also contribute to a strengthening of intergovernmental co-operation within the UN. The UN Secretary-General appears to share this position when he notes:

"Expanding and deepening the relationship with NGOs will further strengthen both the institution and the intergovernmental debate. This is an opportunity for the United Nations to enhance its impact in a world that is remarkably different from the one in which it was founded nearly 60 years ago".<sup>26</sup>

Concrete starting points for reforming UN-NGO relations are the problems of participation already identified and still unresolved, and certain recommendations made in the Cardoso Report and the corresponding Report of the Secretary-General. The current reform negotiations on the Human Rights Council, the Peacebuilding Commission and ECOSOC are also relevant for the future role of NGOs at the UN. As the President of the General Assembly Jan Eliasson has announced that he will dedicate more attention to these aspects, his reform agenda should include the following topics:

*General Assembly:* Despite resistance from certain governments, Kofi Annan's proposals for a full and systematic engagement with NGOs in the General Assembly must not be swept from the negotiating table. The simplification of the NGO accreditation process also fits in well with the process of cutting down superfluous bureaucracy at the UN secretariat. A pragmatic first step towards overcoming the current impasse on reform could be for the General Assembly to establish an Open-ended Working Group which, over the course of a year, would work out concrete proposals for the strengthening and expansion of UN-civil society relations, including those with the General Assembly in particular. The meetings of the Working Group should be open to NGOs.

<sup>25</sup> See UN Global Compact (2005): The Global Compact's Next Phase. New York: UN ([http://www.unglobalcompact.org/content/AboutTheGC/gc\\_framework.pdf](http://www.unglobalcompact.org/content/AboutTheGC/gc_framework.pdf))

<sup>26</sup> United Nations Secretary-General (2004), para. 3.

*NGO Hearings:* Complementary to other forms of participation, Hearings with NGO representatives could serve to present the experiences and positions of civil society to governments and the UN. They could be a useful step towards opening the General Assembly to NGOs. As Kofi Annan has suggested, thematic Hearings could be held regularly in the run-up to major events and to the annual General Assembly meetings. The Security Council could also make more frequent and systematic use of Hearings than it has done so far. Governments must not, of course, misuse such Hearings as a fig leaf to conceal the lack of more extensive forms of civil society participation.

*Human Rights Council:* The question of future NGO involvement is central to the transformation of the ECOSOC's Human Rights Commission into a new Human Rights Council. In General Assembly negotiations so far there has been disagreement over whether ECOSOC's consultative rules should be carried over to the new Human Rights Council or whether the much more restrictive Rules of Procedures for subsidiary organs of the General Assembly should be adopted.<sup>27</sup> If governments opted for the more restrictive rules, they would significantly limit NGO participation and thus adversely affect the effectiveness and credibility of the new Human Rights Council. The extension of the ECOSOC consultative rules to cover the Human Rights Council, by contrast, could set a positive precedent for other UN bodies.

*Peacebuilding Commission:* The General Assembly is to establish the Peacebuilding Commission as an intergovernmental advisory body. Judging by the draft resolutions so far, governments do not envisage any systematic involvement of non-state actors. Nevertheless, the Peacebuilding Commission is to be called on "to consult with civil society, non-governmental organizations, including women's organizations, and the private sector engaged in peacebuilding activities, as appropriate".<sup>28</sup> This phrasing offers interpretative space for a variety of different types of participation. Quite how this will translate into praxis will become apparent once the commission takes up its work at the beginning of 2006.

*ECOSOC:* In the 2005 World Summit Outcome Document, governments agreed to transform ECOSOC into a sort of "MDG Council". Its fu-

ture task will be above all to monitor the realisation of the internationally agreed development goals, including the MDGs, each year, and civil society is also to be involved in this process. For NGOs, this could open up new opportunities to present independent analyses and experiences of the realisation of the development goals to governments, and to have some influence over the further realisation of these goals as well as some input into the global development discourse more generally.

*Multi-Stakeholder approaches and partnerships:* The concept of multi-stakeholder initiatives and partnerships between governments, business and civil society is experiencing a boom which appears to be expanding unfettered within the UN system. However, so far, the UN has not carried out any systematic investigation into the success and the potential side effects of existing initiatives. Before they continue pursuing these approaches, they should therefore subject their partnership projects to an exhaustive and independent evaluation, including an exploration of what influence representatives of private business interests have, within the context of multi-stakeholder initiatives, over the analysis of global problems, over the forming of political strategies, and over the financing of UN projects and programmes. These selective partnerships should under no circumstance replace systematic participatory rights for NGOs within the UN.

*Code of conduct for NGOs:* Parallel to the demands for an extension of NGO participatory rights, there are also demands for an NGO code of conduct. Both the Cardoso Panel and the UN Secretary-General took up this topic in their reports. Such a code of conduct would require NGOs to demonstrate their commitment to the principles of the UN Charter. In principle, NGOs support this idea, as long as it is not misused by governments or by the UN secretariat to impose political conditions on NGO accreditation in order to exclude critical groups from UN participation.

*NGLS:* In his report on the Cardoso Report, the UN Secretary-General correctly pointed out the high regard in which NGLS is held by NGOs. NGLS, with its offices in Geneva and New York, and its information services, has contributed immeasurably to the strengthening of NGO participation at the UN. But, many governments and UN organisations have failed to recognise the worth of its work properly and have been hesitant about voluntary funding contributions. Aware of the resulting financial crisis the NGLS was experiencing, Kofi Annan suggested that NGLS be integrated into the UN Secretariat in order to raise its institutional status and stabilise

<sup>27</sup> The proposal to apply the Rules of Procedure of the subsidiary organs of the General Assembly is supported *inter alia*, by Pakistan, Cuba, Iran, China, Singapore, and Indonesia.

<sup>28</sup> Draft Resolution by the President of the General Assembly, 14 December 2005, para. 21. (<http://www.reformtheun.org/index.php/articles/1862>).

its funding. However, in the short term, the opposite has happened. Some donors withheld their contributions after Kofi Annan's statement, but the UN Secretariat has been unable to make up the balance deficit. NGOs have sent a letter to the UN Secretary-General drawing attention to the precarious position in which the NGLS finds itself and demanding both that the institutional independence of NGLS be upheld, and that sustainable funding be secured for its future work.<sup>29</sup>

*Transparency and Dialogue:* Various relatively simple and un-bureaucratic measures could also improve the participation of NGOs at the UN. The UN Secretary-General has himself suggested carrying out better-organised and more systematic consultations between the UN secretariat and NGOs in the future.<sup>30</sup> Even the transparency of discussion and negotiation processes at the UN could be improved without a great deal of effort. There has been some progress in recent years in making all official UN documents available for free on the internet within the Official Documents System (ODS).

It would however also be helpful to make working papers, discussion papers, letters, briefings and background studies available and accessible to the public on the UN website. In the follow-up to the 2005 World Summit, the President of the General Assembly has taken some positive steps in this direction.<sup>31</sup>

Whether the tendency sketched out above, towards growing exclusivity and selectivity in relations between the UN and civil society, continues, or whether civil society participation will be systematically reinforced and with it a pluralistic multilateralism within the framework of the United Nations, will depend on the outcome of reforms in all these areas.

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<sup>29</sup> See the International NGO Task Group on Legal and Institutional Matters, Letter to the Secretary-General about NGLS, 25<sup>th</sup> of Oktober 2004 (<http://www.globalpolicy.org/reform/initiatives/panels/cardoso/1025intglim.htm>)

<sup>30</sup> United Nations Secretary-General (2004), para. 54.

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<sup>31</sup> See <http://www.un.org/ga/president/60/summitfollowup/>



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