

NEWSLETTER

December 2014, third issue

I. MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT OF CONGO

Looking to 2015

THE UNITED NATIONS 70TH ANNIVERSARY

Why is the UN's 70th Anniversary in 2015 of particular relevance to the world of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). Here are some considerations.

A. Thousands of NGOs/CSOs have a consultative, operational or other working relationship with one or more parts of the United Nations System worldwide. These are international/regional/national NGOs/CSOs of all sizes, and spread throughout all continents.

B. It is manifest that the United Nations System (all 50+ agencies, secretariats, programs, departments, commissions, forums...) should be the prime location for intelligent, knowledge-based, rational and future-oriented intergovernmental debate and decision-making, to respond to – and where possible resolve – the complex issues and needs of our interconnected planet. Competent and responsible NGO/CSO input to intergovernmental debate and decision-making is a major factor in enhancing competent and responsible government output.

C. The strength and relevance of NGOs/CSOs derive from their extraordinary diversity. They are "front-line soldiers" in both advocacy and grass-roots cooperation with the United Nations System. NGOs/CSOs cover innumerable concerns: sustainable development, migration, indigenous peoples, ageing, status of women, disarmament and peace, freedom of association and assembly, promotion of democracy, human rights, financing for development, mental health, the family, narcotic drugs, volunteerism, and much more. Many NGOs/CSOs are currently deeply engaged in promoting the UN Post-2015 Agenda, generating expanded knowledge of, and access to, all levels of this complex, challenging and unifying process.

D. In society, NGOs/CSOs give voice to and advocate on behalf of citizens and their interests. NGOs and CSOs are, after all, nothing more – and nothing less – than groupings of citizens who have self-organized to promote a good cause (poverty eradication, access to justice, widening the information society, health for all, humanitarian relief etc) or to combat a bad one (trafficking in human beings, pollution of the oceans, child soldiers, violence against women, nuclear proliferation etc). They work with and through United Nations Conferences, Summits, organs and legal instruments. The moral and ethical "power" of NGOs/CSOs knows no limits, so one must be gravely concerned at the increasing number of examples throughout the world of regressive government action to limit, constrain, cast a slur on, or even disband or "outlaw" legitimate NGOs and CSOs. NGOs/CSOs have an essential role in society as responsible actors for democracy, human rights and the rule of law. As key elements of participatory democracy, NGOs/CSOs are complementary to institutions of representative democracy. NGOs/CSOs

themselves are representative of the long-term causes they promote, and need no authorization or condescension from transitory governments.

E. The United Nations System has been, and can be even more, a positive force in

- connecting, strengthening and scaling local and regional civil society networks, in the context of international advocacy and action
- connecting diverse communities: universities, foundations, associations, institutes, research centers, federations, alliances, scientific and technical bodies, and naturally grass-roots and other activist organizations
- addressing/harnessing/encouraging NGOs/CSOs to promote imagination and innovation in confronting the world's problems, progressively adapting both civil society AND United Nations modalities and practices
- facilitating NGO/CSO advocacy campaigns around global issues that are or should be addressed by intergovernmental structures, for example disarmament, population, social development, environment, ageing, social justice, human settlements, women's empowerment, sexual and reproductive rights, and many more...

F. Every one of the topics mentioned above can be, and should be, brought to the forefront of international dialogue throughout the UN's 70th Anniversary Year. The Anniversary is an occasion to underline the fundamental synergy between UN VALUES and NGO/CSO ETHICS, and to focus on TOGETHER preparing the world to be a better place for future generations. To that end, let us deliberately and enthusiastically cooperate throughout the UN's 70th Anniversary!

Cyril Ritchie
President of CoNGO

NB This issue of the CoNGO E-NEWSLETTER marks the completion of the in-house internship with the CoNGO Geneva Office of our Swiss intern Nathalie Schenker. During her three months of internship Nathalie has been professional, prolific, purposeful, pleasant, persistent, patient, painstaking, in short a Pearl! Thank you immensely, Nathalie, and also for your willingness to continue to volunteer for CoNGO even after taking up full-time employment in Berne from January. The very best wishes to you for an undoubtedly successful career. CR

II. CONGO COMMITTEES

NGO (New York) Committee on Migration together with the ICMC (International Catholic Migration Commission)

Civil Society recommendations on Protection of Migrants at Sea

Many civil society organizations around the world have supported the following recommendations on Protection at Sea. These recommendations are in the larger context of addressing the assistance and protection needs of all migrant and refugee victims of violence and trauma in transit.

As in other moments in history, people are being driven across borders by armed conflict, political repression, and economic destitution. Some are so desperate that they risk their lives boarding unseaworthy boats to cross the Mediterranean and other seas.

We call for a clear needs-first approach to the challenge of protection at sea and emphasize that *all* who cross the sea are bearers of universal, international human rights. All must be treated with dignity and respect. This includes all migrants, quite explicitly those who are refugees, asylum seekers, stateless persons, particularly vulnerable women and children, and victims of torture, human trafficking, trauma and violence in transit.

It is the responsibility of States, with the support of the international community as a whole, to:

- 1. Ensure a needs-first approach to rescue at sea (SAR) operations and reception centres, regardless of anyone's migration status
- 2. Scale-up existing multi-actor frameworks of protection on a needs-first basis that meaningfully engage civil society competencies and partnership
- 3. Establish a protocol based on a needs-first principle to protect particularly vulnerable migrants and refugees, e.g., women and children
- 4. Ensure fair and competent responsibility-sharing and regional cooperation among coastal and non-coastal States of tasks and costs involved in SAR, relocation and resettlement procedures
- 5. Address "route causes" and "root causes" of forced and dangerous migration
- 6. Ensure that border management is firmly based on human rights principles
- 7. Empower migrants and refugees

A multi-stakeholder Migrants-in-Crisis Group should develop a matrix of existing legal instruments, guidance, and practical examples on how States and other parties can best protect all migrants and refugees in distress crossing sea, land, and air borders.

For further information, visit the NGO Committee on Migration's website: http://ngo-migration.org/

III. CIVIL SOCIETY NEWS & UPCOMING EVENTS

Human Rights Day 2014 (10 December 2014)

Divest from War, Invest in our Future

The Future of Human Rights Forum organized an event to commemorate the Human Rights Day on 10 December 2014 and to highlight and develop fresh approaches to issues of concern as well as to encourage greater public participation in the decision-making process at the international, regional, and national levels.

Beside the screening of the documentary "Paradise or Oblivion" and the presentation of youth initiatives such as the NGO *Relief and Reconciliation for Syria*, a human rights app or *Govfaces* which is a website to improve dialogue and political interaction with citizens, a panel discussion on "Human Security as a Prerequisite to Human Rights" was held.

In the 66 years since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a lot of things have been achieved – norms, treaty bodies or the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) are important elements to assure human rights for everyone. However, governments have applied, for instance, economic and social rights more and more ambiguously during the economic crisis; they have adopted austerity measures but at the same time have been increasing their military spending. Craig Mokhiber from OHCHR goes even further when he presented the – very cynical – current vision of security: torture is not an assault of human security, it is a part of security; mass surveillance is not violating the right to privacy or security, but it protects your security.

Last year, governments spent over 1700 billion dollars on the military sector. This money could be invested into other sectors, for instance into sustainable development, the environment or a peace culture education. To achieve the right to peace, the *Right to Peace movement* calls for a reform of the UN Security Council where the right to veto is not allowed anymore for situations where human rights violations occur and NGOs should be involved into the Security Council's daily work as well. Finally, the *Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)* stated that the traditional definition of security has failed and that thus women should be included into the concept to better prevent conflicts.

Get more information about the event here: http://fhrf.org/fhrf/2014-2/

Read here how the OHCHR commemorated the day on the topic "Human Rights 365": http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/HumanRightsDay2014.aspx

Universal Health Coverage Day (12 December 2014)

Two years ago, the United Nations unanimously adopted a resolution that urged governments to ensure universal access to health care without financial hardship. On 12 December 2014, the World YWCA organized together with 160 global partners the first-ever Universal Health Coverage Day. They commemorated the affirmation of the right of every person to have the opportunity for the highest standard of health; the responsibility of governments to urgently scale up universal access; and the promise of health for all to create a fairer, more resilient society.

People fall into poverty because they cannot afford health care when they are ill. But health has the potential to transform communities, economies and nations. This is why already more than 70 countries have passed laws on universal health coverage, including 30 of the world's poorest. Nevertheless, much work in the provision of health care is still done by faith-based organizations because governments are failing.

Women and girls are a particularly vulnerable group. Their basic human right to existence is often threatened because still more than 100 countries do not have a functioning civil registration system and thus birth certificates are not always issued. Also sexual and reproductive rights are often not realized because of a lack of health services.

Since the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo in 1994, dramatic changes to the good have been achieved, but the MDG Agenda is still unfinished. Thus, to achieve universal health coverage mind-sets need to change first.

For further information, please visit: http://www.worldywca.org/YWCA-News/World-YWCA-and-Member-Associations-News/First-ever-Universal-Health-Coverage-Day

International Bill of Rights

An initiative launched by a team of international lawyers, amongst them UN independent expert Alfred de Zayas, composed the International Bill of Rights which aims to guarantee fundamental rights for everyone. The campaign is accessible on the internet and collects signatures from citizens from all over the world. More than 1570 signatories already agreed to accept to pledge in solidarity with others globally to respect and share human rights.

The following is stated in the Preamble of "humanity's written agreement to live together":

"We the people of our international community, our human family, declare that there are certain fundamental rights that are inherent in every human being, that they are inalienable for all people in all countries, and they are enforceable in the courts of all countries."

To sign the campaign and get further information, please visit: http://internationalbillofrights.org/

July 2015: Third International Conference of Asian Population Association

The Asian Population Association (APA) organizes from 27-30 July 2015 the 3rd International Conference in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

The themes will include:

- Population size, growth, distribution or characteristics issues (including children and youth, gender, population ageing)
- Fertility, fecundity and reproductive health
- Mortality, morbidity and cause of death
- ❖ Migration: internal, international (including refugees) and urbanization
- Marriage, family, kinship and religion
- Demographic theory and methods (including demographic training)
- ❖ Interdisciplinary studies, education, labour, economics and development
- All other submissions (disability, environment, wellbeing and happiness, etc.)

Further information: www.asianpa.org

IV. UN NEWS & UPCOMING UN EVENTS

United Nations Forum on Business and Human Rights (1-3 December 2014)

Based on the resolutions 17/4 and 26/22 of the Human Rights Council, the 3rd Business and Human Rights Forum on "Advancing business and human rights globally: alignment, adherence and accountability" took place from 1-3 December 2014 in Geneva. The conference was organized by the UN Working Group to promote dialogue and cooperation on issues linked to business and human rights.

Over 2000 participants attended the multi-stakeholder event and followed high-level discussions on current global trends, thematic tracks and parallel sessions on issues such as the responsibility of the financial sector, indigenous people, national action plans and the right to privacy in the digital age.

The Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights were an important subject of discussion. In 2011 they were designed to address global governance gaps characterized by the lack of government capacity or will to protect human rights and the increased reach and impact of corporations. At the forum, the Guiding Principles were acknowledged as good achievement; they are the first globally accepted framework to clarify the respective duties and responsibilities of governments and business to prevent, mitigate and remedy adverse human rights impacts of business operations. Nevertheless, since their adoption no advancement and only weak implementation have been achieved. Thus, NGO representatives called for a legally binding treaty on business and human rights.

For more information, please visit:

 $\underline{\text{http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Business/Forum/Pages/ForumonBusinessandHumanRights.as}}\underline{\text{px}}$

TEDxPlacedesNations (11 December 2014)

In the framework of the promotion of the "Genève Internationale", the United Nations Office at Geneva organized a TEDx event. Over 1600 participants were present at the Palais des Nations with additional auditors via webcast and at "viewing parties" at the UN Headquarters in New York and around the world.

In the spirit of ideas worth spreading, TEDx is programme of local, self-organized events that bring people together to share a TED-like experience. The x indicates that it is an independently organized TED event. TED is a non-profit institution that started in 1984 as a conference where technology, entertainment and design converged, and today the short powerful talks cover almost all topics.

The organizers used the event to showcase people and those who benefit from international organizations based in Geneva (among others UNHCR, WHO, ITU, CERN, Geneva Call). The 18-minutes speeches were held on subjects such as cities and urban development, big data, Ebola, and sanitation as a basic human right. In very personal and appealing speeches Vincent Cochetel, a refugee aid worker, spoke on "Attacks on Humanitarians are Attacks on Humanity" and the Afghan Parliamentarian Fawzia Koofi talked about her experience "When Women are at the Table".

To watch the videos and get further information, please visit: http://www.tedxplacedesnations.ch/

FAO "Food for Talks" Series, 2nd edition (11 December 2014)

Family Farming: feeding the world, caring for the earth

In the context of the International Year of Family Farming (IYFF) FAO organized its second event in the "Food for Talks" series which aims at highlighting the importance of agriculture, food and nutrition security and sustainable development, raising awareness on the multidisciplinary issues and sharing inspirational ideas for concrete actions. Inspired thinkers and speakers from various fields of expertise gave their perspective on issues related to Family Farming.

During the IYFF strong political commitment has been shown from all sectors. Family farmers are the most prevalent form of agriculture in the world -80% of the world food (in value terms) is produced by family farmers. Further, family farming is the most important source of employment. Family farms are the key to sustainably respond to the food and nutrition security challenge. Nevertheless, they face major concerns: family farmers work on only about 12% of the world land, are particularly vulnerable to risks such as diseases, pests and drought, and are challenged by the growing competition in international markets, volatility of prices and youth disengagement.

Christine Bühler from the Swiss Farmers' Union stated that "the guarantee of food is the guarantee for peace and stability in society". However, family farmers need support and protection from the state; in Switzerland 57% of the farmers' income is state aid. On the African continent, according to the Ambassador of the African Union, Jean-Marie Ehouzou, awareness on the positive impact of agriculture needs to be strengthened – a lot of food gets imported and yet only 40% of the fertile land is exploited by farmers.

Civil society organizations met in November in Brazil and agreed that to further promote family farming the youth needs to be included and that farmers should be involved in research, too. Family farming is the solution to feed the planet and to employ people – the IYFF is the time to take action on this important issue.

Further information on the FAO: http://www.fao.org/europe/log/fao-liaison-office-in-geneva-log-home/en/?no cache=1

UNHCR Policy on Alternatives to Camps

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees has published a policy to pursue alternatives to camps, whenever possible, while ensuring that refugees are protected and assisted effectively and are able to achieve solutions.

The Policy on Alternatives to Camps applies in all UNHCR operations for refugees and in all phases of displacement from contingency planning and preparedness to emergency response to stable and protracted refugee situations and the pursuit of durable solutions. Refugees have a distinct legal status and rights under international law which guide UNHCR's response under this policy.

UNHCR is accountable for ensuring that refugees are able to access protection and assistance wherever they are living. Millions of refugees have settled peacefully outside of camps in both

rural and urban areas, living on land or in housing that they rent, own or occupy informally or in hosting arrangements within communities or families. Refugee camps nevertheless remain an important feature of the humanitarian landscape. About 40% of all refugees live in camps, most often because they have no alternatives.

Refugee camps are diverse. They include planned or self-settled camps and settlement or other facilities, such as collective centres. Camps are locations where refugees reside and where, in most cases, host government and humanitarian actors provide assistance and services in a centralised manner. The defining characteristic of a camp, however, is typically some degree of limitation on the rights and freedoms of refugees and their ability to make meaningful choices about their lives.

Pursuing alternatives to camps means working to remove such restrictions so that refugees have the possibility to live with greater dignity, independence and normality as members of the community, either from the beginning of displacement or as soon as possible thereafter. The possible alternatives to camps are also as diverse as the refugees and the communities, cultures and laws and policies of the countries where they reside. They will be defined by the degree to which refugees are able to exercise their rights, such as the ability to move freely, choose where to live, work or open a business, cultivate land or access protection and services.

Camps can also be an essential part of UNHCR's operational response, particularly during emergencies. Camps can facilitate the rapid provision of protection and life-saving assistance in the event of a large-scale refugee influx. The establishment of camps can also facilitate the identification of people with specific needs and the delivery of services to them. UNHCR may at times agree to support the establishment of a camp, in order to ensure admission to territory and access to asylum. While camps are an important tool for UNHCR, they nevertheless represent a compromise that limits the rights and freedoms of refugees and too often remain after the emergency phase and the essential reasons for their existence have passed.

UNHCR's experience has been that camps can have significant negative impacts over the longer term for all concerned. Living in camps can engender dependency and weaken the ability of refugees to manage their own lives, which perpetuates the trauma of displacement and creates barriers to solutions, whatever form they take. Camps can also distort local economies and development planning, while also causing negative environmental impacts in the surrounding area. In some contexts, camps may increase critical protection risks, including sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), child protection concerns and human trafficking. Camps may also not contribute to security, where they become a venue for the forced recruitment or indoctrination of refugees.

Enabling refugees to reside in communities lawfully, peacefully and without harassment, whether in urban or in rural areas, supports their ability to take responsibility for their lives and for their families and communities. Refugees bring personal skills and assets, as well as the qualities of perseverance, flexibility and adaptability demonstrated through their flight and survival. Refugees who have maintained their independence will be more resilient and better able to overcome future challenges than if they had spent years dependent on humanitarian assistance.

UNHCR's policy is to avoid the establishment of refugee camps, wherever possible, while pursuing alternatives to camps that ensure refugees are protected and assisted effectively and enabled to achieve solutions. Although many governments require that refugees reside in camps and, at the onset of an emergency, UNHCR may also find it necessary to set up camps to ensure protection and save lives, camps should be the exception and, to the extent possible, a temporary measure.

Read the entire policy here: http://www.unhcr.org/5422b8f09.html
For further information, please contact: HQATC@unhcr.org/5422b8f09.html

V. INTERGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights

The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights was established by the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. The Commission consists of 11 members elected by the African Union Assembly from experts nominated by the State parties to the Charter. The Commission created subsidiary mechanisms such as special rapporteurs, committees, and working groups to achieve its objectives of promoting and protecting human rights on the continent. The Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders was established by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights with the adoption of Resolution 69 at the 35th Ordinary Session held in Banjul, The Gambia from 21 May to 4 June 2004.

More information: http://www.achpr.org/

VI. CALENDAR

NOTICE:

- 1. The CoNGO Calendar is a service to the NGO constituency to enable each individual organization to determine, in good time, its possible or desired involvement in the event mentioned, in accordance with the organization's own statutory or programmatic focus.
- 2. The conferences and meetings listed in the CoNGO Calendar are not under the convening or invitational or access responsibility of CoNGO. They are listed for the information of readers, and any queries about any event should be addressed solely to the organizer of the event, not to CoNGO.

Cyril Ritchie, President of CoNGO

2015

70th Anniversary of the United Nations Organization (1945-2015) http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=48149#.U9oWsvl_vTo

150th Anniversary of the International Telecommunications Union (1865-2015) http://www.itu.int/en/council/150committee/Pages/default.aspx

World Summit on Social Development-Copenhagen+20 http://undesadspd.org/CalendarofEvents.aspx

UN International Year of Soils http://www.fao.org/soils-2015/en/

Serbian Chairmanship of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) http://www.osce.org/pc/121276

January

January 30: Committee on Teaching About the United Nations: 16th Annual Conference at the United Nations – "The UN at 70: Making a Difference" (UN Headquarters, New York) http://www.ctaun.org/conferences/conferences2015-un/

February

February 4-13: DESA-ECOSOC: 53rd Session of the Commission for Social Development: "Rethinking and strengthening social development in the contemporary world" (UN Headquarters, New York) http://undesadspd.org/CommissionforSocialDevelopment/Sessions/2015.aspx

February 18-20: Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights: 2015 Social Forum – "Access to Medicines in the context of the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, including best practices in this regard" (Palais des Nations, Geneva) http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Poverty/SForum/Pages/SForum2015.aspx

March

March 9-20: UN ECOSOC Commission on the Status of Women: CSW59 / Beijing+20 – "Implementing the Beijing Platform for Action" (UN Headquarters, New York) http://www.unwomen.org/en/csw/csw59-2015

March 14-18: UNISDR: 3rd World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (Sendai, Japan) http://www.unisdr.org/we/coordinate/wcdrr

March 21: World Down Syndrome Day http://www.un.org/en/events/downsyndromeday/

April

April 2: World Autism Awareness Day https://www.un.org/en/events/autismday

April 4-15: Meetings of the Conferences of the Parties to the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions (Geneva)

http://www.cooperationinternationalegeneve.ch/meetings-conferences-parties-basel-rotterdam-and-stockholm-conventions

April 12-17: World Water Forum: 7th World Water Forum – "Water for Our Future" (Daegu and Gyeongbuk, South Korea) http://worldwaterforum7.org/en

- **April 12-19:** UNODC: 13th UN Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice "Integrating crime prevention and criminal justice into the wider UN agenda ..." (Doha, Qatar) https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/crime-congress/13-crime-congress.html
- **April 18:** Kota Center: Conference on the Kota World Center for Women (New York) www.kotaproject.org
- **April 27-29:** Women's International League for Peace and Freedom: WILPF 2015 Conference "Women's Power to Stop War" (The Hague, Netherlands) https://wilpfact.wordpress.com/category/wilpf-history/

May

May 19-22: World Education Forum 2015 (WEF) (Incheon, South Korea)
http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/leading-the-international-agenda/education-for-all/world-education-forum-2015/

June

June 7-9: Organization of American States (OAS): General Assembly (Haiti) http://www.oas.org/en/default.asp

June 9-11: UN enable: 8th Session of the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN Headquarters, New York) http://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?id=1535

June 22-24: Deutsche Welle (DW): Global Media Forum – "Media and foreign policy in the digital age" (Bonn, Germany)
www.dw-gmf.de

July

July 13-16: UN: 3rd International Conference on Financing for Development (Addis Ababa, Ethiopia)
http://www.un.org/esa/ffd/third-conference-ffd/index.htm

July 27-30: Asian Population Association: 3rd International Conference (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia) www.asianpa.org

July 28-31: TRANSED: 14th International Conference on Mobility and Transport for Elderly and Disabled Persons (Lisbon, Portugal) http://www.transed2015.com

2016

UN Commission on Human Settlements: HABITAT III http://unhabitat.org/habitat-iii/

UNODC: Special Session of the UN General Assembly on the World Drug Problem – "Achieving the 2019 Goals – A better Tomorrow for the World's Youth" www.ungass2016.org

German Chairmanship of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)

May

UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs: UN World Humanitarian Summit (Istanbul, Turkey)
http://www.worldhumanitariansummit.org/

May 23-27: UN Environment Assembly: Second Meeting of the UN Environment Assembly (Nairobi, Kenya) http://uncsd.iisd.org/events/second-meeting-of-the-un-environment-assembly/

September

September 23-25: Global Campaign on Military Spending: World Congress – "War, Money, Transformation: Disarmament for Development!" (Berlin, Germany) http://demilitarize.org/get-involved/conference-2016/

2018

UN General Assembly: UN High-Level Conference on Nuclear Disarmament http://www.2020visioncampaign.org/en/action-alerts/high-level-nuclear-disarmament-conference.html

UN-Habitat: 9th World Urban Forum (WUF9)(Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia) http://unhabitat.org/kuala-lumpur-to-host-world-urban-forum-in-2018/

2019

100th Anniversary of the International Labour Organization (ILO) http://www.ilo.org/century/lang--ja/index.htm