
CoNGO PRESIDENT'S STATEMENT
26 June 2020

United Nations Charter Day 2020

On June 26, 1945 a new dawn arose. On that day the United Nations Charter was signed in San Francisco, creating a successor to the League of Nations, and declaring unambiguously that the new United Nations Organization's goals were, inter alia,

- to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war,
- to establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained,
- to practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbours.

The UN Charter, from the outset, established the world organization to be at the apex of solutions to the major global challenges that are necessary conditions for building a peaceful world, including international economic and social cooperation to ensure social and economic progress for all on the basis of equal rights and self-determination of peoples. For the first time human rights was made into a central objective of a world organization.

The United Nations Charter created the prime multilateral international institution that would be the linchpin for a complex but indispensable system of interdependencies. Governments and peoples had learnt that the alternative to multilateralism—unilateralism and rote nationalism—had led the world to the disasters of two World Wars.

As civil society celebrates the values enshrined in the UN Charter—signed by governments on behalf of “We, the peoples”—and celebrates the values enshrined in the UN Charter, we cannot but ask: Why have wars between, among, and within nations so frequently recurred? Why are inequalities and uneven development between rich and poor increasing both at the international and national level? Why can the international financial institutions continue to practice policies that are at odds with the UN, while the Charter calls for the coordination of all specialized agencies? Why is unaccountable power of transnational corporations expanding? Why have the legacies of centuries of slavery, colonialism and racism not been repaired? Why have treaties and international law been so frequently neglected or undermined? Why has disarmament become a forgotten topic when the resources squandered on arms could well add needed resources to sustainable development for all?

Civil society salutes the aims and purposes of the United Nations as defined in the Charter and will continue, as it has done untiringly for 75 years, to work for their achievement. We plead and we demand that the governments of UN member states do no less: that they live up to their commitments and promises, and that they take their Charter commitments seriously and unremittingly. As it has done for 72 of those years, since its founding in 1948, the Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations (CoNGO) pleads and demands that governments recognize that the civil society organizations in their countries and internationally are a powerful force working for the public good, acting selflessly to promote and expand those same causes for which the United Nations was established.

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Article 71 of the UN Charter opened the door to non-governmental organizations, and over the years there have been innumerable beneficial interactions between the UN and NGOs—in all their operational and terminological diversity. The establishment of formal consultative status for NGOs with the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) was groundbreaking for the system of international relations. ECOSOC Resolution 1996/31 governs the establishment of consultative status as well as that of accreditation of a broader group of civil society to United Nations conferences and consultations. It contains principles and modalities for regular NGO participation in designated United Nations bodies that have stood the test of time and enjoys broad NGO support. It is in that context, and in furtherance of the UN Charter values, that CoNGO pleads and demands that governments take every opportunity to further incorporate into their deliberative and decision-making processes the competent voices of NGOs and all civil society. The encouragement and acceptance by governments of the input of the knowledge, competence, and experience of peoples and communities will in consequence enhance the output of governmental mechanisms, thus making treaties, conventions and other decisions more realistic and implementable. That would be wholly in line with the goals of the Charter.

It is time now to reaffirm the benefits, indeed the indispensability, of multilateralism. Renewed and reinvigorated multilateralism, especially in this year of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the UN, is fundamental to achieving two other of the UN Charter principles:

- to unite our strength to maintain international peace and security
- to employ international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples.

The UN Charter principles are key to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, which encapsulate the fundamental purpose of having an effective and reliable United Nations Organization devoted to “the advancement of all peoples”, and to shaping a more just, participatory, peaceable and equitable world.

But for the United Nations System to be effective and reliable, it must be adequately resourced—in finance and personnel. CoNGO repeats its oft-expressed alarm over the negative effects of the continuous shrinking of the regular budget of the United Nations. Significantly more than in 1945, a multitude of today’s global problems respect neither territorial boundaries nor received notions of international relations. The unfinished agenda of decolonization and corollary issues related to self-determination cry out for attention.

The United Nations System is more and more the world’s “plumber” not of last but of first resort, called into service to “stop the leaks” before a deluge (climate change, a pandemic, natural disasters, weapons of mass destruction, endemic poverty, global hunger, forced migration, gender violence and injustice, racism...) overwhelms our only planet. For this, we plead and demand that governments adopt this year a sufficiently increased UN regular budget, and over the long term a generous increase. And of course, that governments then pay their contributions fully and on time!

“Building Back Better” is not just a slogan for the post-COVID-19 recovery period (long as that may yet be), but a challenge to build better on the UN Charter. Even more urgent now is to build back beyond pandemic management and into addressing the roots of the global social maladies that afflict us, by acting justly and peaceably, and ensuring that peoples and communities reap and enjoy equitably the benefits of multilateral negotiations, foremost of which are agreements in the protection of human rights and ecological justice. And we must build back in such a way that neither war, nor poverty, nor systemic racism, are inevitable. The Charter is a tool and an opportunity. “We the peoples” plead and demand that governments work with us—in consultation, collaboration and cooperation—to save succeeding generations from the scourges of the twenty-first century.

For further information:

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