

CIVIL SOCIETY SUMMIT ON
SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES

October 25, 2021, Monday

9:00 AM to 4:30 PM EDT | New York City, Virtual

“Shaping the Future: The UN We Need *for* the World We Want”

Organized by the Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations in
Consultative Relationship with the United Nations



CONCEPT NOTE

**CIVIL SOCIETY SUMMIT ON SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES
Held on the Occasion of the United Nations Day 2021**

Theme: Shaping the Future: The UN We Need *for* the World We Want

(October 25, 2021, Monday, Virtual, 9:00 AM to 4:30 PM, EDT, New York)

IMPETUS FOR THE SUMMIT

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres (Our Common Agenda): “Decisions made today will define the future for younger and future generations....Humanity faces a series of long-term challenges that evolve over the course of multiple human life spans: warming and degradation of the planet, as well as managing new technologies such as artificial intelligence and gene editing, demographic shifts towards an older population, urbanization and the evolution of social welfare provision. With the fourth industrial revolution, we are in one of the most important transformational moments in recent history. The way in which people live, work, eat and interact with each other is likely to look very different in the future. Yet our dominant political and economic incentives remain weighted heavily in favour of the short term and status quo, prioritizing immediate gains at the expense of longer-term human and planetary well-being. Decisions made today will shape the course of the planet for centuries. Our understanding of “we the peoples” in the Charter of the United Nations needs to be expanded to protect the interests of all the people of the twenty-first century and to bequeath a liveable world to those who will follow.”

Declaration of CoNGO on the Occasion of the 75th Anniversary of the United Nations: “On the occasion of the 75th Anniversary {of the United Nations}, we call upon the United Nations and Member States to enter into a dialogue with civil

society to create innovative partnerships that respond to the challenges of a changing world. The spirit of Agenda 2030 requires the robust participation of the peoples of the world so that the benefits of multilateralism are felt in their daily lives. Everyone must work in concert so that the United Nations we need for the world we want prospers in a rules-based international order. We call upon Member States to recognize the vast potential of civil society as an essential element of the international system, defining the present and shaping the future. We must dismantle the hurdles to physical and political access to United Nations processes, to achieve internationally agreed development goals and social justice agendas.”

UN Declaration on the commemoration of the UN 75th anniversary (A/RES/75/1): “We will boost partnerships. Today’s challenges require cooperation not only across borders but also across the whole of society. We have to make the United Nations more inclusive and engage with all relevant stakeholders, including regional and sub-regional organizations, non-governmental organizations, civil society, the private sector, academia, and parliamentarians to ensure an effective response to our common challenges.”

WHY A CIVIL SOCIETY SUMMIT ON SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES?

On the occasion of United Nations Day 2021, CoNGO, the Conference of NGOs in Consultative Status with the United Nations, invites you to participate in a virtual **Civil Society Summit on Substantive Issues** on Monday, 25 October 2021.

The Summit on Substantive Issues will focus on 1) identifying the issues and concerns we as NGOs are addressing and must address today, and 2) examining whether our responses to these issues and concerns are adequate and relevant—both in the present context and for the future. These foci are predicated on a self-understanding of the roles of NGOs, civil society groups and social movements, and an assumed understanding of how such roles interface with the goals of the United Nations.

We are looking for your best thinking, and your organization’s best thinking, on our collective priorities.

The Summit is partly a venue to engage the report of UN Secretary General António Guterres to the UN General Assembly, *Our Common Agenda*, and partly an effort to determine CoNGO’s strategic direction for the period beyond 2021, as it reaches its 75th anniversary in 2023.

If we are to contribute to shaping the future, what should that future be, and how can we prepare ourselves and our communities? What agenda can we hold in common? What values must we engender and what actions must we take if we, with others, are to build the world we want? What must we understand about today if we are to contribute to building tomorrow? What actions must we take to address today’s problems in ways that respond to current needs and anticipate future expectations? Above all, how can we mobilize our various publics to address the challenges of today and tomorrow?

As for the UN, what would it take for the world organization to be fully effective, efficient and relevant for the world and the future we want? What innovations are required for multilateral action, and how can we build the trust that multilateral action requires? What must we assert as roles and offer as contributions –as NGOs, CSOs and social movements—in shaping that future we envision?

What can you do? What can CoNGO do? Above all, what can the UN do, with our help?

As a preliminary event leading to the 27th CoNGO General Assembly, this summit invites civil society representatives around the world to join [CoNGO member organizations](#) and members of its [NGO Committees](#) in shaping the strategic directions of CoNGO as it moves into its 28th term (2021-2025). A synthesis of the product of the thematic panels will be submitted for consideration by CoNGO when it meets for its [27th General Assembly](#).

BACKGROUND READINGS FOR THE SUMMIT

UN Secretary General's Report: [Our Common Agenda](#)

[Declaration on the Seventy-Fifth Anniversary of the United Nations \(A/Res/75/1\)](#)

[Declaration of CoNGO on the Occasion of the 75th Anniversary of the UN](#)

A Statement of CoNGO: [NGO Access to and at the United Nations in the Time of the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)

CoNGO President's [Statement on NGO Access Millennium Forum Declaration \(2000\)](#)

Summit Lead Chair: *Liberato Bautista* (President of CoNGO)

Lead Rapporteurs: *Cyril Ritchie* (First Vice President, CoNGO), *Martina Gredler* (Second Vice President, CoNGO), and *Humphrey Tonkin* (University President Emeritus, University of Hartford, CoNGO Board Member)

KEYNOTE PANEL: THE FUTURE IN THE PRESENT TENSE

9:00 AM-10:15 AM EDT

Welcome: *Liberato Bautista* (CoNGO President)

Panelists: *Irina Bokova* (Former Director General, UNESCO), *Radhika Coomaraswamy* (Under-Secretary-General and Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children in Armed Conflict), *Garry Jacobs* (President and CEO, World Academy of Art and Science), *Francis Hult* (Professor of Educational Linguistics, University of Maryland, Baltimore County)

THEMATIC PANELS

Panel 1. Human Dignity and Human Rights

10:20 AM-11:15 AM EDT

Chair (Bobbi Nassar)

Panelists: *Craig Mokhiber* (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, New York), *Cecilia Jimenez-Damary* (UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Internally Displaced Persons), *Anselmo Lee* (Asia Civil Society Forum for Sustainable Development)

Rapporteurs (Scott Stearman and Bruce Knotts)

Panel 2. Agenda 2030: Sustainable Development and Humanitarian Action

11:20 AM-12:15 PM EDT

Chair (Ingeborg Geyer)

Panelists: *Richard Amalvy* (The Brazzaville Foundation), *Rudelmar Bueno de Faria* (ACT Alliance), *Anita Thomas* (Chair, NGO Committee on Financing for Development), and *Rebecca Malay* (Former Co-Chair, Global Call to Action Against Poverty)

Rapporteurs (Anita Thomas and Ivy Koek)

Panel 3. Peace and Threats to Security of People and the Planet

12:20 PM-1:20 PM EDT

Chair (Hiro Sakurai)

Panelists: *PL de Silva* (Seton Hall University), *Jenaina Irani* (Global Network of Women Peacebuilders), *Christopher Ferguson* (Former General Secretary, World Communion of Reformed Churches), *Grace Ji-sun Kim* (Earlham School of Religion),

Rapporteurs (Helga Kerschbaum and Nazlee Maghsoudi)

Panel 4. Social Justice: Migration, Racism, and Health

1:25 PM-2:20 PM EDT

Chair: Dorothy Davis

Panelists: *Saths Cooper* (Pan African Psychology Union), *Eni Lestari* (International Migrants Alliance), *Manjit Dosanj* (CERN | ICEC)

Rapporteurs (Robert Hejdenberg, Priska Fleischlin, and Chris Hanway)

Panel 5. Gender Justice, Youth and Intergenerational Solidarity

2:25 PM-3:20 PM EDT

Chair (Houry Geudelikian)

Panelists: *Myriam Sfeir* (Arab Institute for Women | Lebanese American University), *Kehkashan Basu* (UN Human Rights Champion | Regional Organizing Partner for North America for the NGO Major Group | Founder-President of Green Hope Foundation), *Nafisa Ferdous* (Senior Programs Manager, Restless Development)

Rapporteurs (Laurie Richardson and Beverly Bucur)

**Panel 6. UN-NGO Relations: Enhancing Multilateralism, Ensuring Access,
Protecting Civic Space and Discourse
3:25 PM-4:30 PM EDT**

Chair (Liberato Bautista)

Panelists: *Mandeep Tiwana* (CIVICUS), *Eleanor Openshaw* (International Service for Human Rights), *James Paul* (Former Executive Director, Global Policy Forum), *Gitanjali Sah* (WSIS | International Telecommunications Union)

Rapporteurs (Holly Shaw and Shantu Watt)

Civil Society Summit: Closing Remarks

Cyril Richie (CoNGO First Vice President)

SUMMIT MODALITIES

1. The Civil Society Summit on Substantive Issues is open to the public, but especially NGOs and civil society participants. Each panel is a standalone event. The thematic foci of the panels, taken together, make a cohesive whole. They address a wide range of civil society concerns. The recommendations arising from the panels will be commended to various audiences, but especially civil society at large and the UN, systemwide.
2. A synthesis of the discussions at the thematic panels will be submitted for consideration by CoNGO when it meets for its [27th General Assembly](#). The summit will thus serve as a platform to hear and develop recommendations for CoNGO assembly to consider. Representatives of member organizations of CoNGO, the NGO Committees related to it have been urged to participate.
3. Each panel will proceed in succession, each with its own zoom link that will run for exactly 55 minutes. A five-minute interval between two panels will allow participants to login to the next panel session.
4. The summit presider will convene a meeting of all the chairs and rapporteurs to agree on the actual mode of conducting the panel sessions, including on a brief description of each panel—to help focus the panel and guide participants on which panel to join.
5. A list of background documents is included in this concept note. They inform the planning of this Summit and thus are helpful background reference for summit participants.
6. Members of NGOs and NGO Committees are encouraged to spread out their participation in the different panels—aiming to cross-fertilize the different panels with varied perspectives.