
Strengthen Social Justice and Solidarity at the Core of ECOSOC and HLPF's Mandates

Speech by Liberato Bautista¹

*At the second informal consultation to review the General Assembly resolutions
75/290 A and 75/290 B and their annexes on strengthening the Economic and
Social Council and the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development*

7 March 2024 | ECOSOC Chamber | United Nations, New York

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen:

1. The Conference of NGOs in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations, also called CoNGO, which is in general consultative status with ECOSOC, thanks the distinguished Co-Facilitators, the Permanent Representatives of the Republic of Latvia and the Republic of Guinea, for inviting me to this second informal consultation to review the General Assembly resolutions 75/290 A and 75/290 B and their annexes on strengthening the Economic and Social Council and the High-level Political Forum on sustainable development. This is a necessary process, and I thank you for continuing to include civil society participation, especially NGOs accredited by ECOSOC.
2. The pulse and life of society are its people. Civil society is constitutive of that pulse and life beat. People's life stories and flourishing, as much as their struggles and strivings, must go beyond footnotes into main notes in multilateral texts. This understanding will be reinforced in Nairobi this May at the UN 2024 Civil Society Conference supporting the Future Summit of the Future. I read the Elements Paper with such a view.
3. Reading the **Elements Paper**, I was struck by how many items we could express our complete agreement on. Let me emphasize a few, hoping they do not get deleted along the rough and stony road of negotiation.

¹ Liberato Bautista is the President of the Conference of NGOs in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations and the Main Representative to the UN of the General Board of Church and Society of The United Methodist Church.

CoNGO INTERNATIONAL SECRETARIAT

CoNGO New York | Office of the President, 777 UN Plaza, Suite 7C, New York, New York 10017 | T: +1 212 973 1701 | E: president@ngocongo.org
CoNGO Geneva | PostBox 50 | 1211 Geneva 20, Switzerland | T: +41 22 301 1000 | F: +41 22 301 2000 | E: firstvp@ngocongo.org
CoNGO Vienna | c/o Dr. Martina Gredler, Obere Donaustrasse 43/1/15 A-1020 Vienna, Austria | E: svp@ngocongo.org

- a. In the **Chapeau (pt. 6)**, we welcome the text “*strong commitment to multilateralism and to accelerating implementation of the 2030 Agenda and SDGs,*” even as we urge continued review of multilateralism as a crucial venue not just for addressing the future but also for the continuing past, not the least the legacies of slavery, colonialism, and racism that continues to slow down efforts to address the uneven development of peoples and nations and their economies, even political cultures. These reviews should examine how multilateral processes and ECOSOC and HLPF themes address global poverty, forced migration, health injustice, peace, violence, and the need to demilitarize national and international relations. All these, even as we affirm the interrelatedness and interdependencies of all the SDGs and the coherence of the Agenda 2030.
- b. In the **Review of ECOSOC**: We welcome the text related to the *enhancement of the engagement of civil society...in ECOSOC meetings* (Gaps. Pt. 3). But this has been said many times in as many multilaterally negotiated texts. For NGOs to contribute meaningfully to the recovery of people and the planet from the pillage of social and health pandemics, including climate change, NGOs must be afforded access to both physical premises and the promises of the UN for their voice to be heard and their expertise tapped in achieving Agenda 2030—and the promises that are about peace and prosperity, progress and partnerships, for people and the planet. This concern is underscored in the **review of the HLPF Programme** “*Fully implement provisions of previous GA resolutions on strengthening the contribution of MGOS and NGOs to the HLPF*” (Point 5), in the text “*Facilitate ongoing dialogue between governments, civil society, and other stakeholders, and share best practices and lessons learned*” (Pt. 6), and in the review of the HLPF, the text “*Encourage the involvement of relevant stakeholders in a whole of society approach, and include stakeholders in deliberations at the national, regional and global levels*” (VNRs, Pt.5).
- c. Much progress has been achieved in civil society participation and expertise in the systemwide multilateral agenda at the UN. Much more remains to be done. In this case, the ECOSOC's Committee on NGOs is primarily responsible for advancing the implementation of **ECOSOC Resolution 1996/31**, which governs the consultative status of NGOs, UN systemwide, including in ECOSOC's functional bodies in Geneva, Vienna, and the regional commissions. The Elements Paper must include this resolution regarding NGO engagement with ECOSOC. This resolution, adopted by governments, is a commitment by those same governments to ensure the optimal contribution of civil society in the work of ECOSOC. This includes accrediting NGOs from vast and varied geographic locations worldwide, but especially from underrepresented groups and regions of the global South, and in a fair, safe, inclusive, and timely manner to ensure NGOs can fully exercise their consultative status. We recognize that the ECOSOC Committee on NGOs is overworked, and its DESA Secretariat needs to be funded. It would also benefit from much more

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 CoNGO Geneva | PostBox 50 | 1211 Geneva 20, Switzerland | T: +41 22 301 1000 | F: +41 22 301 2000 | E: firstyp@ngocongo.org
 CoNGO Vienna | c/o Dr. Martina Gredler, Obere Donaustrasse 43/1/15 A-1020 Vienna, Austria | E: svp@ngocongo.org

www.ngocongo.org

significant and timely funding of the United Nations by its member governments, a call CoNGO has frequently advocated for.

In the **Review of HLPF**, we welcome the statement that HLPF "Themes should be informed by the recommendations of the Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR) of 2023." Including the "*issue of internal displacement in the ECOSOC agenda*" (**Review of ECOSOC**, Point 7) is essential and must remain in the text. Global migration, especially force and massive displacement, dispersal, and dislocation of peoples and communities, are existential threats to the flourishing of people and the planet and must be at the forefront of the ECOSOC agenda.

- d. In the **Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs)** section of the **review of the HLPF**, we welcome the text "*Encourage the involvement of relevant stakeholders in a whole-of-society approach*" (Pt.5). This follows the same theme as our view about participation and partnerships with civil society. Much more can be said here, but I would like to highlight for now the importance of not just the VNRs but also the work of the UN systemwide—and that is our concern for linguistic diversity and language justice. As enshrined in various rights instruments, from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, among others, human rights include linguistic human rights. We cannot forget about multilingualism as we prepare for the High-Level Political Forum and the Summit of the Future. Multilingualism is a core value of the United Nations, so it must be a core consideration when implementing sustainable development. About SDG 1, in particular, let us take stock of how linguistic discrimination exacerbates poverty by excluding people from employment opportunities and other life chances. Concerning SDG 16, let us reflect on how language rights are being respected on all levels in ways that support inclusive societies and equitable institutions. Let us ensure that multilingualism for sustainable development receives the attention it deserves in the Pact for the Future.

Excellencies and colleagues,

4. I conclude by expressing concern that there does not appear to have been an assessment and analysis of the implementation of the recommendations in Resolution 75/290 A and B to provide a basis for new recommendations. For example, Para. 15 of resolution 75/290A required the promotion and review of the implementation of the ministerial and political declarations - was this done? What review was carried out to facilitate the recommended improvements? New recommendations will need to be more precisely defined. Given the urgency to meet the SDGs, there is no time for generalities.

5. We are way behind in the SDG implementation. The HLPF must fulfill its mandate under resolution 67/290 when the General Assembly decided that the HLPF "shall provide political leadership, guidance and recommendations for sustainable development." And yet, we

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still need to be on track to meet the goals. It is time to stop using COVID-19 as an excuse. We were off-track even before the pandemic. Moving forward, we must be bold and unflinching and leave no one behind. We need to be more explicit, more precise, more ambitious. The Elements Paper provides good ideas, but the recommendations must be specific. Ideas must now turn into transformative action.

6. As we review the work of the Council and the HLPF, our moral compasses must not veer away from justice and solidarity, indeed even compassion, as we feel the brunt of the poly-crises and intersecting health and social pandemics and face conditions of uneven economic development. ECOSOC and its leadership are in an unenviable position to lead us to a common agenda to establish a just, peaceable, and inclusive future. In line with recommendations of the UN Secretary General's High-Level Panel on the Teaching Profession, the role of educators and the academe in teaching and enjoining all peoples of the world, diverse partners, and stakeholders in the work to achieve the SDGs and realize Agenda 2030 is crucial and necessary. Civil society can do its share in this shared work on this common agenda.

I thank you for your kind attention.

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