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**Synthesis Report on the  
CoNGO Civil Society Summit on Substantive Issues**  
October 25, 2021

A. The October 2021 Civil Society Summit on Substantive Issues, conceived and organized by the President of CoNGO, Liberato Bautista, surpassed expectations. Its title was challenging: “Shaping the Future: The UN We Need *for* the World We Want”. Panelists and participants contributed their experience, their competence, their doubts about the world we currently have, their aspirations and proposals for the world we want and must achieve. This Outcome Document highlights some of the Summit’s key thoughts, some key concerns, some key intentions, especially those raised at the keynote panel on “the future in the present tense”. It is made available to all participants, and will form the basis for a follow-up discussion at the CoNGO 27<sup>th</sup> General Assembly being held on November 29-30 and December 1, 2021.

B. The Summit’s Panels touched upon almost all the major issues confronted on a daily basis both by innumerable Civil Society Organizations and by the United Nations System: Human dignity and human rights; Sustainable development and humanitarian action; Peace and threats to security of people and the planet; Social justice, including migration, racism and health; Gender justice, youth and intergenerational solidarity; UN-NGO relations — enhancing multilateralism, ensuring access, protecting civic space and discourse. The Summit became all too aware of the importance of communication—both communication in languages people understand and internet accessibility and connectivity, especially in the developing world. The Summit took into account the inspiring words and proposals of the UN Secretary General in his document “Our Common Agenda”, and also the well-thought-out texts that CoNGO and its members have issued in the recent past to pinpoint what needs to be done to strive towards the UN we need *for* the world we want. The Civil Society Summit was rich in outlining concepts and actions needed to shape the future. An initial selection of principal points is set out herewith, not in an order of priority, but rather grouped in relation to several of the questions posed in the Summit Concept Note. They take account of further inputs from Summit Chairs and Rapporteurs. The submitted statements and panel reports are available on the CoNGO website ([www.ngocongo.org](http://www.ngocongo.org)).

- C. What must we understand about today if we are to contribute to building tomorrow?
- a. Some 3.7 billion people still do not have access to the internet: this needs investment

today in existing technology and also in skills directed towards achieving a technological breakthrough. Specifically, the development in recent years of Information and Communication Technologies has created opportunities to use innovation for better inclusion of women and protection of their rights: this must be pursued by all actors. Much of the UN's communication with its publics is in languages they do not understand: far more attention needs to be paid to multilingualism and to linguistic justice generally.

b. Public information is increasingly lacking in integrity: fake news abounds. The UN and Civil Society have to unremittingly uphold and advance the highest information standards and convince governments and media conglomerates to do the same.

c. Ancient repugnant practices and attitudes are still extant and even being reinvigorated: slavery, colonialism, racism, militarism, xenophobia, homophobia, ageism, patriarchy, misogyny. They are historic injustices that must be combated, and their intersecting complicities have to be exposed. We must multiply our efforts at eliminating structural and systemic racism.

d. The world counts some 274 million migrants and 16 million Internally Displaced Persons: inadequately resolving such issues is a sure cause of instability, increased vulnerability, and perpetual conflict. We heard migrants assert their voice and agency, saying, "For a long time others spoke on our behalf. Now we speak for ourselves." Indeed, migrants and refugees must be at the table when their human rights, needs and concerns are at stake. Both the Global Compact on Migration and the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, inadequate as they are to protect the rights of migrants and refugees and their families, remain short on implementation. The same holds true for the Global Compact on Refugees.

e. The shrinking of civil space and the rollback of fundamental freedoms has grown to proportions threatening democracy, human rights and the Rule of Law. This also harms human development and the security of the entire population. The UN and Civil Society must push back against the pushback on human rights and fundamental freedoms.

f. Delayed and/or inadequate action by governments and big business on the threats posed by climate change are leading inexorably to climate chaos, imperiling the future of humanity. Climate change is a key driver of poverty and an inhibitor for sustainable development, exacerbating population displacement and conflicts. Action today, not promises today, are what the world needs.

g. The creation of "new" money to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic has not resolved inequalities in the availability of vaccines, still less led to the preparedness of nations and communities to meet future pandemics. The COVID-19 situation is a further illustration of the interests of the few taking precedence over the needs of the many. A cardinal principle should be prioritizing people and the planet over profit.

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h. If there are lessons for world peace and security to be learnt from today, we need look no further than Afghanistan, Haiti, Lebanon, Libya, Myanmar, Syria, Yemen. Or to our collective responsibility for managing climate change, the health of the oceans, or the control and distribution of water. Contrary to governmental and military power ploys, civil society actors are the conscience of the world, and the last line of defense that separates us from catastrophe and extinction or the survival of humanity, flora and fauna, and the planet. Their sustainability are intricately linked to human and planetary security.

D. What values must we engender and what actions must we take, both to anticipate future expectations and to build the world we want ?

a. Quality education, including education for global citizenship, is of capital importance. It must provide choices for people, and be based on a culture of peace, of dialogue, of ethics and of respect. Education at all levels must also specifically foster the appreciation of cultural diversity, promote self-determination towards emancipation, and be delivered in the languages the learners understand.

b. The UN and Civil Society must raise up solidarity as an essential universal standard, proclaiming it a global public good. We need a new social contract that is not about economic recovery alone, but an approach based on broad consensus and not on special deals, and brings to the fore the voices of civil society and impoverished and marginalized communities. This ties in with the undisputable assertion that all civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights are equal and on par. The defense of human rights is a necessary and noble mission of solidarity, to be carried out everywhere by and for all of humanity. The UN and Civil Society must also work more closely together on disaster risk reduction, strengthening community resilience, livelihoods and climate change adaptation.

c. Peace is not only the absence of war but the presence of justice in society. It is peace derived from the weight of reason and democratic suasion and not by the force of arms and military arrangements. Sustainable peace and human security reinforce each other. We must cultivate peace with each other, and with nature and the earth. Gender equality and justice foster conditions that make peace possible for all.

d. The climate-gender-youth intersection requires our full engagement, recognizing that women and girls consistently carry the main social burdens. In all current and post-pandemic economic recovery efforts, macrolevel finance policies with a people-centred approach are crucial to address the existing inequities in access to health, education, social protection and employment. Financing must also be gender-transformative.

e. Security must be defined as human security of the individual and of peoples and their communities, rather than the security of the state or of its elite. Human security includes protection for the vulnerable, gender justice, redress for victims, empowerment for rights holders

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and accountability for perpetrators of human rights violations. Human security is closely linked with Agenda 2030 and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

f. While preserving undiluted human rights standards and law, new instruments must be adopted, such as a Convention on the human rights of older persons.

E. What role for the United Nations System (and therefore also for member states)?

a. There must be much greater national recognition, ratification, and implementation of international law, conventions and treaties. National implementation of Declarations and Programmes of Action from all UN Summits and World Conferences is also weak. All these commitments are equivalent to promises made by governments to their population and as such must be fulfilled, without backtracking because of political self-interest or short-term electoral goals.

b. To achieve its intended purposes in fostering human rights, social justice and the rule of law, the UN needs more resources for the training both of UN and government officials, and of judges, lawyers and police forces.

c. Governments are called on to endorse (and fund) the Secretary-General's intention to appoint a Special Envoy for Future Generations. (It is recalled that the 2014 CoNGO General Assembly supported a similar proposal, then entitled Ombudsman for Future Generations). CoNGO must engage its membership in the shaping and empowerment of future generations as envisaged by the UN SG's "Our Common Agenda", including the proposed convening in 2023 of a Summit of the Future. A robust, responsible and responsive UN – and multilateralism itself – must invest in our children and youth.

d. The UN – and therefore member-states – must take more practical steps to extend political and physical access to responsible civil society organizations, including youth, indigenous peoples, feminist and community voices, defenders of the environment, technical bodies, and others engaged in liaison with the UN. These are valuable partners for the UN, bringing knowledge and experience that enhances governmental deliberations and policy-making. (References were made to some UN entities that offer good practices in this area, for example OHCHR, UNHCR, UNICEF, UN Women, WFP, WSIS). UN notifications to civil society of opportunities to attend UN Conferences must be timely and effective, and ensure transparent and accountable registration processes. Whatever steps are needed or taken (or not taken...) to improve UN access, the work of Civil Society will continue unabated and with intense commitment to human values, including UN Charter values. It behooves the UN to take maximum advantage of the links to "the peoples" of the United Nations.

e. Before UN summits or major conferences, the UN should continue to encourage, facilitate and support inclusive civil society fora, to bring people's pressure, voice and

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recommendations directly to the UN body. (It is recalled that CoNGO has inestimable experience in organizing such fora.)

f. There can be no relaxation of determination to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, in full and on time. Multilateral collaboration must be reinforced, as key to achieving the 2030 Agenda, based on human rights approaches. This effort naturally requires cooperation engaging the widest range of civil society. Nothing short of these will achieve peace and prosperity for people and the planet.

g. The budgets of the United Nations System are miniscule in relation to the tasks assigned to it in the UN Charter and by governments. Member States must substantially increase unrestricted funding for the UN, especially to its core budget, on a predictable and timely basis.

#### F. What role for CoNGO?

a. Since a major role for so many civil society organizations is in monitoring governments and holding them accountable on as many fronts as possible, CoNGO's experience and facilitation services need to be built up. CoNGO must be ever more a bridge-builder, and be visible as such, including in underserved parts of the world. CoNGO's collective memory on UN-NGO relations is unrivalled.

b. In working together – more and better – the role of CoNGO Substantive Committees is central: this NGO committee system requires competence, efficiency, outreach, reliability and democracy.

c. One of CoNGO's current initiatives merits full support. A “Compendium of Principles for NGO Good Practice” has been drafted by CoNGO and will be submitted to the upcoming General Assembly for approval. This guidance document should be a valuable tool for the wider civil society community when drawing up internal and public standards.

d. The strength of international laws and agreements lies in their incorporation in national law and implementation at the local level so that they matter to peoples and communities on the ground. CoNGO must foster and demonstrate the relevance of NGOs in underserved parts of the world, where alternate representation at the UN can become meaningful, lest the international community is bereft of local grounding and consigned to irrelevance to peoples and their day to day struggles.

e. All organs of CoNGO – all members of CoNGO – must spread the word about the extraordinary good the UN System does throughout the world every day, preserving and improving the lives of ordinary people.

f. CoNGO also requires a more solid financial base that will enable it to be proactive in

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promoting consultation, collaboration, and cooperation.

G. Some felicitous “take-away” phrases from the Summit:

a. In regard to UN access and to dealing with migrant or refugee issues: “Nothing about us without us”. For migrants and refugees, “For a long time others spoke on our behalf. Now we speak for ourselves.”

b. In regard to shrinking of civil space and to protecting human rights defenders: “We must push back against the pushback” and “Transformational and sustainable development is about acting so that all peoples’ human rights are upheld”.

c. In regard to peace, and indeed to civil society’s role in the world: “We in civil society are the foot soldiers of peace” and “The UN Charter’s ‘We the Peoples’ are the ones to take decisive and forward-looking actions towards a more inclusive, sustainable and cohesive humanity”.

d. In regard to military interventions and to civil wars: “Silence the guns”. “Global ceasefire now”.

e. “There is no Planet B”. The planet we now live in is all we got. We must ensure it to be livable, peaceable, and sustainable.

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**Summit Chair**

Liberato C. Bautista, CoNGO President

**Chief Rapporteurs**

Cyril Ritchie, CoNGO First Vice President  
Martina Gredler, CoNGO Second Vice President  
Humphrey Tonkin, CoNGO Board Member

*Appendix 2A to the Minutes of the 27<sup>th</sup> CoNGO General Assembly.*

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