



Roundup



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We the Peoples: Civil Society, the UN and Global Governance

Report of the Panel of Eminent Persons on UN-Civil Society Relationships

BACKGROUND

In September 2002, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan released his report on UN reform, entitled *Strengthening of the United Nations: an agenda for further change* (A/57/387), which amongst other things pointed out that interaction between the United Nations and civil society “blossomed with the world conferences of the past decade.” However, the report also noted that due to such “explosive growth,” the system for facilitating the interaction between the UN and civil society was “showing signs of strain,” which had given rise to several concerns, including the ability of the UN to manage the growing demand of NGOs to participate in meetings, standardizing procedures in accreditation processes, and achieving a balance in participation between NGOs from industrialized and those from developing countries.

Furthermore, the report suggested “all concerned would benefit from engagement with civil society actors based on procedures and policies that reflect greater coherence, consistency and predictability.” To consider and pronounce upon these and other challenges, the Secretary-General established the Panel of Eminent Persons on UN-Civil Society Relations, appointing, in February 2003, former Brazilian President Fernando Henrique Cardoso to chair the Panel (see box page 6).

Specifically, the Panel was asked to: assess the existing situation—including guidelines, best practices, and experience elsewhere in the UN system and international community; identify new and better ways of engaging; consult broadly; consider how to facilitate the participation of civil society from developing countries; review how the UN Secretariat facilitates and manages its relationships; and present proposals to the Secretary-General for enhancing the interaction between the UN and civil society, including parliamentarians and the private sector, within twelve months.

The Panel held its first meeting from 2-3 June 2003 in New York, developing its terms of reference, examining the importance of civil society in the current geopolitical context, looking at modes of UN-civil society engagement, identifying where the Panel could make useful contributions, and establishing its work programme within a one-year time frame. The Panel held two further full meetings in December 2003 and March 2004.

CONSULTATIONS

The Panel received inputs through a range of activities, including briefings, workshops, and consultations. A questionnaire was

widely disseminated in July 2003 to civil society, the private sector, parliamentarians and others soliciting their views and experiences of their interaction with the UN. Its results were reviewed by the Panel at its December 2003 meeting.

At the regional level, three consultations were held in Johannesburg (South Africa), Bangkok (Thailand), and Rio de Janeiro (Brazil). Several dozen consultation meetings with specific issue networks were organized on the margins of existing regional and international meetings, bringing together a large number of civil society actors, including those attending the annual DPI/NGO Conference (New York), World Parks Conference (Durban, South Africa), the WTO Ministerial Meeting (Cancun, Mexico), the World Social Forum (Mumbai, India), and the International Civil Society Forum (Ulan Bator, Mongolia). Focus group meetings were organized with specific constituency groups such as the private sector, local authorities, parliamentarians, religion-based NGOs, and foundations. The Panel also met with UN staff with civil society organization (CSO) expertise. A total of 58 consultation meetings were held from June 2003 to March 2004. Findings from these meetings fed into the Panel’s deliberations on the key issues to be addressed and for building the proposals in its report. Summaries of these consultations are available on the Panel’s website (www.un.org/reform/panel.htm).

“The relationship of the United Nations with civil society organizations is as old as the Charter itself. Partnership between the United Nations system and non-governmental organizations in the humanitarian and development areas has been the rule for decades. ... The extensive interaction of civil society actors with the intergovernmental processes is of more recent vintage. It has really blossomed with the world conferences of the past decade. ... As a result of this explosive growth in participation, the system that has evolved over several years for facilitating the interaction between the United Nations and civil society actors is showing signs of strain:

All concerned would benefit from engagement with civil society actors based on procedures and policies that reflect greater coherence, consistency and predictability. ... As a first step, I will establish a panel of eminent persons to review the relationship between the United Nations and civil society and offer practical recommendations for improved modalities of interaction”.

*From “Strengthening of the United Nations:
an agenda for further change”,
Report of the UN Secretary-General, document A/57/387*

THE HIGH-LEVEL PANEL'S REPORT: PARADIGM SHIFTS

The Panel's report presents 30 reform proposals, some of which the Secretary-General himself would have authority to act on, while others would require intergovernmental debate and decision. These proposals largely stem from four underlying priorities or principles for the UN that the Panel identified over the course of its deliberations:

- The UN must become an outward looking Organization: give more emphasis to convening and facilitating rather than “doing;” put the needs, not the institution, at the centre;
- The UN must embrace a plurality of constituencies: many actors may be relevant to an issue;
- The UN must connect the local with the global: put countries first by starting engagement at the country level for both operational and deliberative processes; global norms should drive the operations, and the country realities should mould those norms; civil society is vital for both;
- The UN must help re-shape democracy for the 21st century: accept a more explicit role in strengthening global governance and tackling the democratic deficits it is prone to, emphasizing participatory democracy and deeper accountability of institutions to the global public.

The report points out that the UN is not starting from scratch: “There is much to be proud of in its existing strategies and recent measures to enhance engagement. Our proposals are largely intended to expand, deepen and protect them, not replace them”. Similarly, it recognizes that the UN's main civil society partners “have already done a great deal to help strengthen the outward orientation of the UN and would be invaluable allies in helping to implement the suggested strategy”. In the sections that follow, the Panel's reasoning and proposals for achieving the paradigm shifts are outlined.

FOSTERING MULTI-CONSTITUENCY PROCESSES

One of the UN's most important contributions has been its ability to bring often-conflicting parties together to tackle global problems, the report notes. In the past, these parties were exclusively governmental; the solutions were first defined by global resolutions and then implemented by governments and international organizations. More recently, non-State actors have become increasingly active and have been key players on a number of issues, including gender, climate change, debt, landmines and AIDS. The Panel points out that few of today's most difficult challenges can be resolved by governments alone; other stakeholders are needed because they have essential knowledge, experience and links to key constituencies. The focus therefore needs to shift from convening generalized assemblies to working with coalitions of actors with diverse but complementary capacities.

Proposal 1. In exercising its convening power, the UN should emphasize inclusion of all constituencies relevant to the issue, recognize that the key actors are different for different issues, foster multi-stakeholder partnerships to pioneer solutions and empower a range of global policy networks to innovate and build momentum on policy options. Member States need opportunities for collective decision-making but they should signal their preparedness to engage other actors in deliberative processes.

The report suggests that removing some of the restrictions of the UN's structure—which it defines as a forum for central governments with limited provision for other actors to participate—would make it more open to vital contributions from a range of constituencies. Today, formal participation is essentially restricted to NGOs in the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and its functional commissions, and consultative status implies that they can speak only when invited. The Panel warns that the agenda of formal UN forums is already overloaded, and simply increasing the pool of participants could make meetings more unmanageable. Instead, it suggests that different modes of engagement be used throughout the evolution and lifecycle of an issue.

Proposal 2. The UN should embrace an array of forums, each designed to

achieve a specific outcome, with participation determined accordingly. The cycle of global debate of an issue should include:

- *Interactive high-level roundtables to survey the framework of issues.*
- *Global conferences to define norms and targets.*
- *Multi-stakeholder partnerships to put the new norms and targets into practice.*
- *Multi-stakeholder hearings to monitor compliance, review experience and revise strategies.*

The Panel observed the growing importance of “networked governance” in which global coalitions of constituencies that include likeminded governments, civil society, and others worked together to influence policy and shape public opinion. In a number of fields, ranging from small arms to conflict diamonds, child soldiers, landmines, and crimes against humanity, such coalitions have already played a crucial role and have influenced global standard and goal setting.

Proposal 3. The Secretariat should innovate with networked governance, bringing people from diverse backgrounds together to identify possible policy breakthroughs on emerging global priorities. It should experiment with a Global Internet Agora to survey public opinion and raise awareness on emerging issues. The Secretary-General should initiate multi-stakeholder advisory forums on selected emerging issues and feed their conclusions to appropriate intergovernmental forums.

Noting that more and more often Member States are viewing big global conferences as costly and “politically unpredictable,” the Panel says they should be used strategically:

Proposal 4. The UN should retain the global conference mechanism but use it sparingly—to address major emerging policy issues that need concerted global action, enhanced public understanding and resonance with global public opinion. The participation of civil society and other constituencies should be planned in collaboration with their networks.

While poor implementation of globally agreed action programmes and targets erodes public trust in multilateralism, the report argues that transparent, inclusive and honest multi-stakeholder monitoring of their implementation would restore trust, and suggests that public hearings—bringing together independent specialists, parliamentarians, community leaders and civil society representatives and others—could determine appropriate course corrections.

Proposal 5. The Secretariat should foster multi-constituency processes as new conduits for voice on UN priorities, redirecting resources now used for single constituency forums covering multiple issues. The UN Secretariat and the secretariats of Specialized Agencies should convene public hearings to review progress in meeting globally agreed commitments. Being technical and concerned with implementation rather than new global policies, the Secretary-General could convene them on his own authority. Proceedings should be transmitted through the Secretary-General to relevant intergovernmental forums.

Recognizing the highly formal nature of General Assembly plenary sessions, the Panel says this UN body should welcome inputs from civil society and others with relevant expertise to make its debates better informed and attuned to citizens' concerns.

Proposal 6. The General Assembly should permit the carefully planned participation of other actors besides central governments in its processes. In particular, General Assembly Committees and Special Sessions should regularly invite contributions by those offering high-quality independent inputs. The participation arrangements should be made in collaboration with the relevant constituency networks. The UN Secretariat should help plan innovative interactive sessions linked to the formal meetings but outside them.

INVESTING MORE IN PARTNERSHIPS

Pointing to the success of local Agenda 21 initiatives in thousands of communities worldwide, the Panel notes that a key lesson learned was that complex issues are solvable and difficult targets achievable if a broad range of actors contributes to all stages of the effort. This demands linking local efforts to global efforts, sharing resources, and fostering joint ownership of both the failures and the successes. The World Summit on Sustainable Development, held in Johannesburg in 2002, specifically linked the intergovernmental and operational processes, and partnerships were accepted as part of the Summit's official outcome.

The Panel calls for multi-stakeholder partnerships for both operational and policy challenges, suggesting that they must be viewed as “partnerships to achieve global goals” and not “UN partnerships”—meaning the UN should help ensure that all needed parties are included, but not seek to own the partnerships. The Panel also recommends that decentralization is vital; partnerships should not be built around a single central office. Furthermore, the Panel suggests maximizing partnership opportunities would call for clear leadership, changes in institutional culture, stronger staff skills, and rigorous learning from experience.

Proposal 7. To mainstream partnerships, the Secretary-General should, with Member States’ approval and donor support:

- Establish a Partnership Development Unit, headed by a high-level staff member to help incubate and decentralise the partnership approach, guide the needed management shifts, ensure sound evaluations and provide support services throughout the UN.
- Identify partnership focal points throughout all UN organs and agencies.
- Review partnership issues in coordination forums, such as the High Level Committee on Programmes and the Chief Executives Board.
- Ensure systematic learning from partnership efforts by creating a multi-stakeholder Partnership Assessment Forum, with UN staff, governments, civil society organizations and others.
- Provide training in partnership development to governments, civil society and other constituencies, as well as to UN staff.
- Periodically review the effectiveness of these efforts.

The report cautions that in spite of the many positive features of partnership approaches, they should not be seen as a panacea. The Panel’s review indicates that the UN’s partnership strategy should be inclusive; clearly define purpose and roles; be participatory; seek flexible funding; ensure good governance; welcome the private sector but ensure that it does not dominate; keep sight of the UN’s mandates; and maximize strategic influence.

Proposal 8. The proposed Partnership Development Unit should ensure that lessons of practice are fully internalized in operational and management approaches, conduct rigorous evaluations to learn about the full costs and development impacts of multi-sectoral partnerships and inform the debate about the institutional implications of the approach.

On engaging the private sector, the Panel notes that the UN needs to engage with these actors—ranging from local micro-businesses to large multinational companies—with different strategies for each, for different modes of engagement.

Proposal 9. The Secretariat should strengthen its relationship with different actors in the private sector by:

- Incorporating the Global Compact under the proposed Office of Constituency Engagement and Partnerships (see Proposal 24).
- Engaging with small and medium businesses and their national associations and helping build the capacity and competitiveness of micro and small businesses.
- Strengthening the Global Compact’s capacity for—and contribution to—enhancing corporate responsibility.

FOCUS ON THE COUNTRY LEVEL

The best place to start enhancing UN-civil society relations, the Panel says, is at the country level. While the UN’s intergovernmental process produces global goals and norms, to be effective these need to be informed by realities on the ground, as viewed by the most affected communities and those working with them. Effective implementation requires operational and normative work of the UN, and strong local-to-global links connecting the two. The report notes that true multi-stakeholder cooperation at the country level is still uncommon and that the UN remains “too inwardly focused.” Even less common is ensuring that country priorities and experiences truly inform the intergovernmental agenda. The Panel suggests that working strategically with civil society and others at the country level can enhance progress in both directions.

Such engagement could enhance CSO and others’ contributions to country strategies for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and other UN goals, and level the playing field between CSOs from the North and South. The Panel recommends strengthening staff capacity in UN Houses or United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) country offices.

Proposal 10: The UN Development Group (UNDG) should ensure that the rhetoric of country leadership, coordination and partnership is put into effective practice, to open space for all constituencies to contribute to UN goals.

At the country level this entails:

- Enhancing the capacity of country offices (UN Houses) to identify, convene and broker the partnerships needed to meet the main challenges and build consensus on country-specific goals (see Proposal 11).
- Conveying systematic messages to country staff about learning from and providing support to civil society and other actors, using the rubric of the Millennium Development Goals and other globally agreed goals as reference points.
- Ensuring that UN Houses work with Regional Commissions to inject the experience of country level actors into regional and global deliberative processes.

At the global level this entails:

- Identifying and rewarding Participation Pioneers within the UN system, by establishing, with donor support, a global fund to support UN innovations in partnership development at country level.
- Identifying and disseminating lessons from innovative partnership and countries where cooperation with non-State actors is strongest.
- Assessing partnership qualities in the annual performance appraisals of Resident Coordinators and other country-level staff.
- Persuading donors to support the extra cost of being an effective networking organization, including the greater investment in coordination that this requires.

The Panel says it considers it timely for a “quantum leap” in the UN’s engagement with civil society at the country level. The main obstacles appear to be a lack of staff, a lack of systematic contacts with national CSOs and misaligned communication and information strategies. While noting that the MDGs and other key goals demand high levels of cooperation and networking, the Panel says the foundation for this must be ensuring that all parties feel respected, and that all parties have access to the fullest information to develop country strategies.

Proposal 11. The Resident Coordinators and UNDG agencies at the country level should undertake the necessary restructuring, coordination and investment to enable the UN to meet the networking challenges by:

- Initially appointing local constituency engagement specialists in 30-40 countries, with facilitation skills and knowledge of civil society in the country (see Proposal 25).
- Reviewing the effectiveness of current country-level information and communications resources, redirecting them to support strategies and partnerships to achieve globally agreed goals.
- Establishing Civil Society Advisory Groups in a pilot range of countries to guide the UN’s strategy; similar advisory groups could be considered for business and other constituencies.

STRENGTHENING THE SECURITY COUNCIL: ROLES FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

The report notes that the Security Council, the UN’s “most politically sensitive organ,” has greatly benefited of late from

“The rise of civil society is indeed one of the landmark events of our times. Global governance is no longer the sole domain of governments. The growing participation and influence of non-State actors is enhancing democracy and reshaping multilateralism. Civil society organizations are also the prime movers of some of the most innovative initiatives to deal with emerging global threats. Hence constructively engaging with civil society is a necessity for the United Nations, not an option.

“This engagement is essential to enable the organization to better identify global priorities and mobilize the resources and talent needed to deal with the task at hand. We also see this opening up of the UN to a plurality of constituencies and actors not as a threat to governments but as a powerful way to reinvigorate the intergovernmental process itself.

“The world stands today at a very delicate juncture. The UN needs the support of civil society more than ever before. But it will not get that support unless it is seen as championing reforms in global governance that civil society is calling for—and which are echoed in our report.”

—Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Chair of the Panel

expanded dialogue with civil society, largely in response to its changing roles in the post-Cold War era, and the changing nature of the conflicts it addresses. Arria Formula meetings, which enable Council members to discuss matters with invited personalities in an informal and closed setting, as well as regular meetings of the NGO Working Group on the Security Council, and expanded contacts with NGOs in capitals have broadened this engagement. The Panel found that those most involved from civil society and Member States are comfortable with this trend, while other civil society actors have suggested that the informal “consultations” are too oriented to northern and mostly New York-based humanitarian and human rights NGOs. The Panel suggests enhancing the mechanisms for exchanges with civil society, especially in field visits, emphasizing actors from the countries in question.

Proposal 12. Security Council members should further strengthen their dialogue with civil society—supported by the Secretary-General—by:

- *Improving the planning and effectiveness of the Arria formula meetings by lengthening lead times and covering travel costs to increase the participation of actors from the field. UN country staff should assist in identifying civil society interlocutors.*

- *Ensuring that Security Council field missions meet regularly with appropriate local civil society leaders, international humanitarian NGOs and perhaps others, such as business leaders. UN HQ and field staff should facilitate these meetings.*

- *Installing an experimental series of Security Council Seminars to discuss issues of emerging importance to the Council. Serviced by the Secretariat, these would include presentations by civil society and other constituencies as well as UN specialists such as Special Rapporteurs.*

- *Convening independent Commissions of Inquiry after Council-mandated operations. A Global Public Policy Committee connecting national Foreign Affairs committees could serve as such a commission (Proposal 15).*

ENGAGING WITH ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES

The Panel stresses that enhancing UN relations with actors beyond its formal membership should help address current democracy deficits in global governance, and suggests that more systematic engagement of parliamentarians, parliaments and local governments in the UN would reinforce representational democracy and connect the UN better with global public opinion. The report—which identifies national parliaments as the most important arenas for policy debate, legislation, financing public programmes and holding governments to account—proposes a four-pronged strategy to achieve this:

- Take UN issues to national parliaments more systematically.
- Ensure that parliamentarians coming to UN events have more strategic roles at these events.
- Link parliaments themselves with the international deliberative processes.
- Provide an institutional home in the UN for engaging parliamentarians.

Proposal 13. The UN should routinely encourage national parliaments to hold debates on major matters coming up in the UN and to discuss these matters with relevant ministers. To facilitate this, relevant draft documents, including progress on the MDGs and other globally agreed goals, should be made available to parliaments when they are transmitted to governments. The Secretary-General should seek the cooperation of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and parliamentarian associations. Member States should regularly consult MPs on UN matters and debrief them after major UN meetings.

The Panel notes that parliamentarians are often included in official delegations of Member States to various UN meetings and that their participation can be made more effective by arranging more purposeful debates targeted at parliamentarians in parallel to UN meetings. The Panel proposes that the UN should explore Global Public Policy Committees (GPPC), based on the experience of select committees that exist in some countries, to help fill a gap in public engagement in global processes.

Proposal 14. Member States should more regularly include MPs in their delegations to major UN meetings, while taking care to avoid compromising the independence of those parliamentarians. The UN Secretariat should test opportunities for MPs to contribute as parliamentarians, including in parliamentary debates before a General Assembly session on a major topic. MPs specializing in a subject could also be invited to speak in relevant

General Assembly committees and Special Sessions, particularly when these review progress towards meeting the MDGs and other agreed global goals.

Proposal 15. Member States should make way for an enhanced role for parliamentarians in global governance. They should instruct the Secretariat to work with national parliaments and the Inter-Parliamentary Union, as appropriate, to convene one or more experimental Global Public Policy Committees (GPPC) to discuss emerging priorities on the global agenda. These committees would comprise parliamentarians from the most relevant functional committee in a globally representative range of countries. In an experimental five-year period, different organizational arrangements could be tested and, through periodic review, refined over time.

Proposal 16. The Secretary-General should form a small Elected Representative Liaison Unit, based on the Non-Governmental Liaison Service, to:

- *Provide a dedicated information service for parliaments and MP associations, including a dedicated web-based information service for MPs.*

- *Encourage greater attention to UN processes in national parliaments.*

- *Help create more effective opportunities for MPs to take part in UN forums.*

- *Organize Global Public Policy Committees, working closely with national parliaments, the IPU, specialized agencies, and other organizations as appropriate.*

- *Foster debate within the UN system about new or improved strategies for engaging MPs and parliaments.*

In this section, the report notes the growing and important role local authorities have been playing in both UN policy debates and working for global goals. In *Proposal 17*, the Panel endorses a proposal from its consultations with Mayors: “The General Assembly should debate a resolution affirming and respecting local autonomy as a universal principle.”

The Panel points out that efforts have been made to include local authorities in various processes, such as the Commission on Sustainable Development through the Major Groups concept adopted at the Rio Summit in 1992. A new body—United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG)—was launched in May 2004. The Panel suggests that the UN and the UCLG explore ways in which they can most productively engage with each other.

Proposal 18. The Elected Representative Unit (see Proposal 16) should liaise with local authorities and their new world association and disseminate lessons of good practice. The UN should regard United Cities and Local Governments as an advisory body on governance matters. The Secretary-General should also require UN bodies with national presence to build close contacts with local authorities and their national and regional associations. Specifically, Resident Coordinators should interact regularly with local authorities to inform them of UN programmes and processes and to encourage partnerships with them.

TACKLING ACCREDITATION AND ACCESS ISSUES

Although the Panel’s proposals emphasize new types of forums for UN engagement with civil society and others tailored to specific needs, traditional modes of engagement—accreditation of NGOs with defined participation rights in UN forums—remain important. The report notes that consultative status should rest on clear and transparent merit—accepting or rejecting CSO applications according to experience and connections with constituencies important to the UN. Noting that decisions on accreditation are made by Member States, the Panel says decisions made for political rather than technical reasons reduce the UN’s access to independent expertise and knowledge. The Panel also expressed concern about the growing phenomenon of accrediting NGOs that are sponsored and controlled by governments (GONGOs): “The speaking opportunities they use in UN forums would be better used by others—in keeping with the original principle of accreditation.”

The report urges Member States to recognize formally what has been an emerging pattern: as civil society actors have become more diverse and skilled in new areas, they have become relevant to intergovernmental forums beyond ECOSOC—the major gateway for civil society entry into the UN. The Panel suggests that the GA now recognize this by agreeing to provide a measured role for civil society in its affairs (see proposal 6) and to assume authority for accreditation.

It also points out that accreditation mechanisms are

problematic for non-State actors, the UN and governments for the following reasons:

- They are often driven by political concerns of Member States rather than the expertise and inputs other actors may offer.
- They vary greatly across the UN system, and so are confusing and time-consuming for all.
- They are often costly (in time and money) and are disconnected rather than streamlined through information technology links (with no UN-wide information sharing).
- They are not transparent or responsive, from the review of applications to the final decision-making stage.

To make the process more efficient for all involved, the Panel suggests achieving cost and time-effectiveness, and streamlining where possible:

Proposal 19. The UN should realign accreditation with its original purpose—an agreement between civil society actors and Member States based on the applicants' expertise, competence and skills. To achieve this, Member States should agree to merge the current procedures at UN Headquarters for ECOSOC, the Department of Public Information, conferences and their follow-up into a single UN accreditation process, with responsibility for this assumed by the General Assembly.

As part of further cost-effectiveness measures, the Panel's proposed Accreditation Unit would receive applications, follow up to ensure applicants have submitted all required materials and review the applicants' relevance to and competence for contributing to UN processes and submit to Member States a list of cases that are recommended (or not recommended) for accreditation. The Panel also suggests that the Accreditation Unit would seek advice from an advisory body, made up of UN staff with constituency expertise, such as CSO focal points.

Proposal 20. Member States should shift the task of reviewing applications to the Secretariat to reduce time inefficiencies and to increase the technical focus of the review. An Accreditation Unit should be established within the General Assembly Secretariat, incorporating staff now responsible for accreditation in different UN departments (therefore budget neutral). This Unit would help set up the advisory body to offer guidance on whether applications should be recommended or not. A designated General Assembly committee would decide on accreditation, based on this guidance. The Secretariat should ensure increased use of information technologies to manage the accreditation process. The S-G should encourage the UN agencies, country offices and others to cooperate in a system-wide effort.

During its consultations, the Panel heard repeated calls for system-wide coordination and greater support from UN country and regional offices in the process. Such coordination is also relevant in the context of the Bretton Woods Institutions (the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund) and the WTO. The report notes that during the Panel's consultations, many civil society actors argued that these bodies lack proper participation and consultation mechanisms. The report calls on the BWIs and the WTO to adopt the more open style of engagement of the UN.

Proposal 21. The Secretary-General should foster enhanced coordination and support for the accreditation process by:

- *Instructing national and regional offices of the UN to facilitate applications.*
- *Using the Chief Executives Board processes to foster closer coordination among UN agencies, funds, programmes and regional commissions.*
- *Ensuring wider availability of information on the rights and responsibilities related to accreditation (say, through booklets aimed at civil society and UN staff).*

The report notes that the ECOSOC categories (General, Special and Roster) have been used for quite a long time, with minor changes in a 1996 review, suggesting that a multi-stakeholder consultation process be set up by the Secretary-General to consider possible new categories such as Network Partners, Consultative Partners, and Programme Support Partners.

Proposal 22. The Secretary-General should initiate a consultative review, to be finished within three years, whereupon proposals would be submitted to the General Assembly for revising the accreditation categories to align them better with today's practices and priorities.

Civil society participation in the UN tends to display familiar imbalances, the Panel heard repeatedly through its consultations. The CSOs represented tend to be headquartered in the global North; those from the South tend to be largely active in the major

cities, with unclear accountability to the grassroots. Speakers are largely male, northern and Anglo-Saxon, and the voices of vulnerable groups are under-represented. The UN cannot enforce better balance, but it can encourage it, the Panel says, especially by monitoring current representation and discussing these matters frankly with the relevant networks.

Proposal 23. The Secretariat should encourage the main constituencies the UN works with to form broad networks to help it with selection and quality assurance. But the UN should not demand this or stipulate how it is to be done. Networks would be encouraged to advise secretariats and Bureaux on the participation of their constituencies in intergovernmental processes and help monitor practices and revise strategies, perhaps evolving into recognised "advisory groups." The UN Secretariat should discuss with these groups possible codes of conduct and "self-policing" mechanisms to heighten disciplines of quality, governance and balance.

STAFF, RESOURCES AND MANAGEMENT

The Panel's proposals go further than enhancing UN-civil society relations. Not only do they entail engagement with a wider range of actors—the full spectrum of constituencies of relevance to the UN's objectives—they also demand very different ways of working in both the UN's operational and deliberative processes, which will require determined leadership by the Secretary-General and other UN managers. The Panel suggests the creation of a modest, high-level office to provide strategic guidance, offer an observatory function from within and outside the UN, and guide the change processes in organizational structures and culture.

To ensure the necessary leadership, staff and other resources for this strategy, the Panel suggests the Secretary-General appoint an Under-Secretary-General to run a new Office of Constituency Engagement and Partnerships (OCEP) and guide the UN on all aspects of its engagement with civil society and others. The OCEP would include a Civil Society Unit, possibly building on the UN Non-Governmental Liaison Service (NGLS), which it says is "highly respected inside and outside the UN—largely due to its interagency mandate and role as a trusted interface between the UN system and civil society, its semi-autonomy and its high professional standards." Besides the Civil Society Unit, the OCEP would also include a Partnership Development Unit (based on the UN Fund for International Partnerships), an Elected Representative Liaison Unit, and probably the existing secretariats for the Global Compact and the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

The overall strategy would have considerable resource implications, but amounting to less than 1% of the UN's operating budget. Most of this could be found from potential savings (particularly from the streamlining of current accreditation processes) and from donor contributions—for which a trust fund could be set up.

Proposal 24. With Member States' approval, the Secretary-General should appoint an Under-Secretary-General in charge of a new Office of Constituency Engagement and Partnerships. This office would be responsible for formulating and implementing the strategy for the UN's engagement with all constituencies beyond its formal membership of central governments. It would monitor engagements throughout the UN system and provide advice and good practice lessons. It could comprise the following:

- *A Civil Society Unit, to absorb the Non-Governmental Liaison Service.*
- *A Partnership Development Unit, to absorb the UN Fund for International Partnerships.*
- *An Elected Representative Liaison Unit.*
- *The Global Compact Office.*
- *The Secretariat of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.*

Appointing Constituency Engagement Specialists

In section 4 of the report, the Panel urges the Secretary-General to appoint Constituency Engagement (or Civil Society) Specialists at the country level, starting with 30-40 priority countries. They might be chosen to reflect the size of the UN's programme and CSO capacities of relevance to it. The specialist would enhance UN knowledge about the dynamics and opportunities in civil society and other constituencies and facilitate high-quality partnerships and dialogue. Reporting to Resident Coordinators, they would advance the UN's strategy for engaging with civil society and others and advise UN system staff.

Proposal 25. With Member States' approval, the Secretary-General should initiate a programme to appoint 30-40 constituency engagement specialists in UN Houses to help the UN and the wider system enhance engagement with a diversity of constituencies. He should invite contributions from bilateral donors and foundations to a trust fund to finance these appointments for a trial four-year period.

Addressing North-South Imbalances

Throughout its work and in the report, the Panel says it has taken into account the imbalances in the voices currently speaking for civil society in most UN processes. The proposals of the report listed below look at correcting some of these imbalances as well as establishing a fund to enhance civil society capacity and partnerships.

Proposal 26. The Secretary-General should make redressing North-South imbalances a priority in enhancing UN-civil society relations. He should enlist donor support for enhancing UN capacity to identify and work with local actors, establishing a fund to build southern civil society capacity to participate and ensuring that country-level engagement feeds into the global deliberative processes.

Proposal 27. The UN should establish a fund to enhance the capacity of civil society in developing countries to engage in UN processes and partnerships. The Secretariat should seek contributions from governments, foundations, UN sources and elsewhere. And it should establish an administration and governance structure for the fund that puts maximum emphasis on decision-making at the country level.

Addressing Management Training and Other Human Resource Development Needs

The Panel points out that progress will be elusive unless civil society relations are at the heart of management throughout the UN, and makes a number of recommendations:

Proposal 28. The Secretary-General and other top UN managers should use frequent opportunities to convey to staff the importance they ascribe to constituency engagement and partnership. These issues should feature prominently in all human resource processes, including recruitment, promotion and annual appraisal. Staff throughout the system, including managers, should be given training in such matters.

PROVIDING GLOBAL LEADERSHIP

The Panel highlights that the UN should use its leadership to urge coordinated approaches to civil society, to encourage governments to provide a more enabling and cooperative environment for civil society, and to foster debate about reforms of global governance, including deeper roles for civil society. This should emphasize principles of constituency engagement, partnership, transparency and inclusion, with a special emphasis on those normally under-represented.

Proposal 29. The Secretary-General should use his capacity as chairman of the wider UN system coordination mechanism to encourage all agencies, including the Bretton Woods Institutions, to enhance their engagement with civil society and other actors and to cooperate with one another across the UN system to promote this, with periodic progress reviews.

Proposal 30. Member States should encourage, through the forums of the UN, an enabling policy environment for civil society throughout the world and expanded dialogue and partnership opportunities in development processes. The Secretariat leadership, Resident Coordinators and governance specialists should use their dialogues with governments to similar effect.

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e-mail <civilsocietypanel@un.org>, website (www.un.org/reform/panel.htm).

THE FUTURE OF MULTILATERALISM

The report notes that the Panel's proposals have implications that are much wider than the UN's relations with civil society, and have a bearing on global governance and the future of multilateralism, which it says faces many threats and challenges today as it seeks to address new global priorities in the midst of an erosion of power and resources.

The report argues that the face of multilateralism is changing and is being increasingly shaped by ad hoc coalitions geared to specific goals comprising parties who are likeminded on a particular issue, but who may differ widely on other issues. The old notion of multilateralism was "omni-governmentalism"—in which all governments first agree on a policy and then move to implementation. The new notion embraces many from different sides who work together to gain support for their case. The report suggests that "the UN was not

Members of the Panel

Chair: President Fernando Henrique Cardoso (Brazil)

Panel Members:

Ambassador Bagher Asadi (Iran); Dr. Manuel Castells (Spain); Ms. Birgitta Dahl (Sweden); Ms. Peggy Dulany (United States); Ambassador André Erdős (Hungary); Ms. Malini Mehra (India); Mr. Juan Mayr (Colombia); Mr. Kumi Naidoo (South Africa); Ms. Mary Racelis (Philippines); Mr. Prakash Ratilal (Mozambique); and Ms. Aminata Traoré (Mali).

The Panellists were appointed as independent experts, representing only themselves, with a balance between geographic regions and gender. Collectively, the Panel has experience in politics, government, the United Nations, civil society, academe, and business.

designed to service such multilateralism, but this is how the world often does business today. So the UN needs to internalize it to stay relevant."

In summary, the Panel says that civil society and other constituencies are important to the UN because their experience and social connections can help the UN do a better job, improve its legitimacy, identify priorities and connect it with public opinion. Civil society can also raise new issues, focus attention on the moral and ethical dimensions of decisions in the public sphere, expand resources and skills, challenge basic assumptions and priorities and protest unfair decisions. Therefore, enhanced engagement, carefully planned, will make the UN more effective in its actions and in its contributions to global governance. "There is a synergy here, not a contest. The UN's opportunities strengthen civil society, and this in turn empowers the UN, enhancing its relevance to the issues of our times."

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