

## **The Need to Democratize Global Governance**

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It has become commonplace to observe that the world is moving toward increased interdependence and integration, that we are inexorably becoming a world society.

In the last century humanity made great strides, largely through the UN system, in forging a global consensus around common norms and institutions.

With globalization and interdependence affecting so many facets of human life, multilateral organizations have taken on growing mandates and competences, responsibilities that often encroach directly on what were formerly areas of national jurisdiction and legislative responsibilities of national parliaments.

These broad trends toward social, political and economic integration can only continue to deepen in the years to come. As the need for global coordination and cooperation becomes ever more apparent, governments will find themselves turning to multilateral institutions more and more. Over time, the United Nations and other multilateral organizations will have to grow in authority. In the process, they will necessarily need to become more democratically accountable. And if their decisions are to be authoritative, they will need greater legitimation than the present voting systems provide.

In recent years, with a growing body of civil society attention to problems of globalization, there has been corresponding attention to the global "democratic deficit," in global governance. There is growing skepticism over the basic premises of the current international order: that international decision-making is a process of deal-making among sovereign governments and that citizens have next to no place in the system.

The problem goes further than the obvious disenfranchisement of citizens. With a lack of participation by citizen representatives, international decisions often fail to reflect the full diversity of views and opinions that are required to ensure a balanced outcome. International diplomacy does not reflect the global popular will.

How do we make the institutions of global governance more democratically accountable and transparent?

There are of course real limits to the extent to which international organizations can be "democratized." These organizations were formed on the basis of treaties, international contracts among sovereign nation-states. One cannot simply apply internationally and all at once the norms of democratic practice which apply within states. International democracy requires not one centralized government, but the legal and institutional structures to underpin a responsive, accountable system of democratic global governance. The challenge therefore is to determine

what are the pragmatic strategies that can and should be pursued to enhance the democratic accountability of international governance.

Three elements of such a strategy include:

- 1) Support increased participation and access rights for civil society organizations at meetings of international organizations and at international conferences;
- 2) Support a growing role for parliamentarians in the work of international organizations through creation and strengthening of parliamentary assemblies and other oversight forums;
- 3) Promote increased transparency in the day-to-day work of international organizations;

### **1) Civil Society participation rights**

The growing role of civil society organizations in the last 20 years, especially through a variety of international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) networks, coalitions, and movements, is a very significant development, one that is changing international decision-making.

Success in the campaigns of global civil society in projects such as the international criminal court, landmines, child soldiers, and conflict diamonds to name a few, cannot be minimized. They have given rise to the term “new diplomacy,,,” indicating diplomatic partnerships between NGOs and like-minded groups of states to achieve a particular political goal.

### **Eminent Persons Panel**

The Cardoso panel is mandated to address the guidelines, decisions, and practices regarding civil society organizations’ access to and participation in the United Nations deliberations and processes.

Assessing all aspects of the UN’s relationship with Civil Society Organizations within an intensive seven-month time frame (July 2003 – January 2004) -- consulting different types of civil society organizations, governments, parliamentarians, and UN officials – is a tall order. Detailed understanding of the UN bureaucracy and existing practices will be critical to developing progressive recommendations. A set of recommendations is to be submitted to the Secretary-General by April 2004.

### **NGO Concerns about High Level Panel**

Some NGOs have expressed concern about the work of the High Level Panel.

- Will members of the high level panel have sufficient opportunity to seek NGO input?
- Some suggest that the eminent persons are too far removed from NGOs to understand firsthand NGO struggles in trying to meaningfully affect the UN’s work. The idea that a high level panel may be defining who they believe civil society to be is worrisome and they would prefer the panel be directed by the UN Secretariat.
- In-depth expertise on the High Level Panel is needed because of the convoluted practices and procedures for NGO accreditation and participation in the UN system, including

knowledge of the workings of ECOSOC and its highly politicized committee on NGOs and various other modalities for NGO participation in the UN system.

Since the inception of the United Nations, citizen's groups have played an important role within the UN system – in public education, expertise, and advocacy. NGO roles were further clarified in ECOSOC (Economic and Social Council) Resolution 1996/31. Nevertheless, the rights of participation and access of non-governmental organizations are routinely challenged at UN conferences, committees, and other meetings.

The World Federalists have called for a UN General Assembly Resolution that would codify NGO participation at the United Nations. Formalizing existing practices, especially in the work of the General Assembly, beyond economic and social areas, would be a significant step.

WFM would like to see the General Assembly extend limited consultative status arrangements to NGOs to the General Assembly and its Main Committees, as well as its subsidiary and ad hoc bodies. These rights would include the right for ECOSOC accredited NGOs to attend UN General Assembly open meetings, receive documentation, and be able to make available their reports and written documents, as regularly done at many UNGA meetings. This resolution would also apply to special session and UN international conferences.

Often there are problems and frustrations at major UN international conferences regarding civil society participation. Civil society organizations are required each time there is a new conference, whether it be the World Summit on Sustainable Development, Special Session on Children, or other UN international conferences, to bargain anew over the guidelines for accreditation, venue capacity, and participatory rights.

Streamlining and standardizing accreditation could de-politicize the process and put an end to wasted time and resources.

WFM also supports the idea of making the UN Optical Disk System (ODS) available on the Internet to accredited NGOs. The ODS database contains all the UN documents in the five official languages. This would greatly facilitate contributions from NGOs throughout the world.

## **2) A growing role for parliamentarians**

Many international organizations have incorporated parliamentary assemblies, or other parliamentary fora as part of their institutional apparatus.

Even when their powers are only consultative in nature, Parliamentary Assemblies and other parliamentary oversight bodies can have an important impact. They can:

- Contribute to international dialogue on global problems, and the need for solutions;
- Catalyze the negotiation of new treaties;
- Build support for international organization back in national capitals, and with the citizenry;
- Reinforce the trend toward democracy in other countries;
- Foster a larger global ethos by symbolizing the idea of community beyond the nation-state.

The European Parliament provides an example of how a consultative forum can evolve over time to become an elected body with legislative responsibilities.

The European experience is illustrative for another reason. It provides an important example of how even a consultative supranational parliament can help propel institutional reform and the evolution of the larger inter-governmental apparatus of the EU.

The Parliamentary Assembly for the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Parliamentary Assembly for the Council of Europe also play significant deliberative and oversight roles in the work of these organizations.

Recent efforts to create parliamentary assemblies for the United Nations and the World Trade Organization have not met with as much success. This week in Cancun parliamentarians will again meet to discuss what sort of parliamentary body is required to oversee the WTO.

At the UN's 57<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, new arrangements were agreed that placed the IPU as the UN's parliamentary dimension. Many believe the IPU to lack transparency and experts have questioned whether IPU deliberations provide value-added – for the UN or for parliamentarians.

The failure of the Inter-Parliamentary Union to meaningfully engage parliamentarians in the work of the United Nations should provoke some serious thinking – especially among the members of the Cardoso Panel – of re-visiting the idea of a more robust UN Parliamentary Assembly.

And we shall see if the parliamentarians gathered at this week's meeting alongside the ICNRD will consider any broader initiative to democratize global governance

### **3) Increased transparency**

Earlier we mentioned as part of an agenda for democratizing global governance the need to promote transparency in the day-to-day work of multilateral institutions. We can mention at least two broad areas of action. First, de-restricting and making available international documents on a timely basis. And secondly, providing regular access for media representatives would go a long way toward increasing public understanding of these bodies.

The days when foreign policy and relationships with multilateral bodies were the exclusive domain of the executive branch are over. The once clear distinction between domestic and foreign policy no longer exists: international relations are shaping domestic events, and external issues and relations have become part of the domestic agenda. We can not rely on sovereign governments to take progressive action to address the global democratic deficit. Civil society must lead.

We are therefore grateful for the opportunity to discuss the need for democratizing global governance at this forum. Thank you for your attention.