



Strengthening civil society engagement with the United Nations

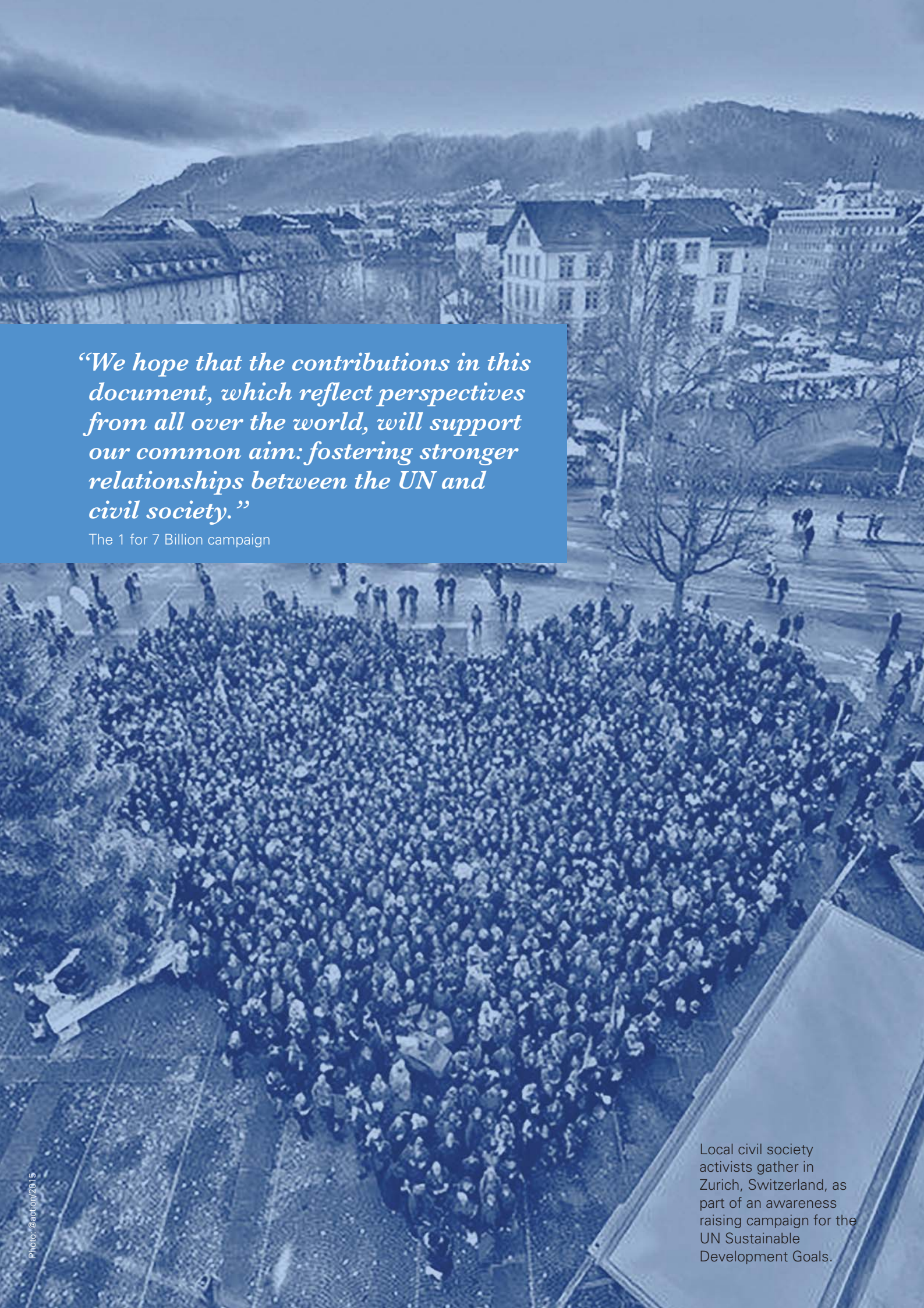
Perspectives from across civil society highlighting areas for action by the UN Secretary-General.

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An aerial photograph of a large crowd of people gathered in a city square in Zurich, Switzerland. The crowd is dense and fills the lower half of the frame. In the background, there are historic European-style buildings and a hillside with more buildings under a cloudy sky. The entire image has a blue color overlay.

“We hope that the contributions in this document, which reflect perspectives from all over the world, will support our common aim: fostering stronger relationships between the UN and civil society.”

The 1 for 7 Billion campaign

Local civil society activists gather in Zurich, Switzerland, as part of an awareness raising campaign for the UN Sustainable Development Goals.



Dear Secretary-General,

As you assume office, 1 for 7 Billion congratulates you on your appointment and applauds your vision of the United Nations and ‘we the peoples’ working jointly for the well-being of humanity.

We welcome your remarks to the General Assembly on 19 October 2016, which emphasised the importance you attach to civil society as a crucial instrument in solving global problems, as well as your assertion that dialogue and cooperation with civil society are central to the UN across its activities. We also appreciate the example you set last year by actively participating in civil society fora to explain your candidacy for the position of Secretary-General, further contributing to the transparency of the selection process.

1 for 7 Billion, which comprises some 750 civil society organisations (CSOs) with a combined reach of almost 200 million people worldwide, was formed in 2014 to campaign for a fair, open and inclusive selection process to appoint the most qualified candidate as Secretary-General. Much has been achieved in the last two and a half years, notably the adoption and implementation of the landmark General Assembly resolution 69/321. Yet much more needs to be done to ensure that these crucial gains are maintained and built upon.

Throughout the campaign, 1 for 7 Billion worked hard to improve the selection process by advocating and supporting input from civil society. We were delighted that the new procedures enabled CSOs and people from all over the world to engage with the process. The high level of public interest was remarkable, demonstrating the huge appetite that exists around the world for closer interaction with the United Nations.

Building on that interest, four of the campaign’s founding CSOs – the United Nations Association – UK, the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung New York Office, CIVICUS and Avaaz – have compiled suggestions from 1 for 7 Billion supporters for improved civil society-UN relations. While the views contained in the compilation are those of the individual contributors, rather than 1 for 7 Billion, they reflect key principles and proposals for cooperation with civil society for which we seek your support:

- The recognition of civil society as an integral part of a coherent system that delivers on the UN agenda;
- Respect for, and safeguarding of, the consultative rights of CSOs through transparent rules of procedure;
- The full realisation and regularisation of CSO engagement with the General Assembly, the Security Council and other UN fora;
- Practical steps to enhance access to the UN, including by those left furthest behind, such as championing broad and diverse civil society and public participation, overcoming logistical and security obstacles and utilising the full potential of modern technology.

We hope that the contributions in this document, which reflect perspectives from all over the world, will support our common aim: fostering stronger relationships between the UN and civil society.

In this regard, we were greatly encouraged by your appointment as Deputy Secretary-General of Ms Amina Mohammed, who helped to ensure unprecedented levels of civil society participation in the process leading up to the adoption of the Agenda 2030.

We are counting on you to be the UN champion for civil society and wish you every success in your work.

Yours sincerely,

The 1 for 7 Billion campaign

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Photo: UN Photo/Albert González Farran

Introduction

The opening words of the UN Charter make it clear that the United Nations is not the preserve of states alone.

After two devastating world wars, people across the globe felt keenly that they had a stake in this new organisation, created to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war. Civil society was engaged in discussions on the shape of the UN from the outset, feeding into the drafting of the UN Charter which went on to be proclaimed in 1945, not in the name of governments, but in the name of “We the peoples of the United Nations”.

Throughout the seven decades that have followed, civil society organisations (CSOs) have continued to play an instrumental role in furthering the UN’s objectives, from assisting with smallpox and polio eradication programmes on the ground to shaping recent landmark agreements on sustainable development and climate change.

Today, the world’s seven billion people remain the Organisation’s most important stakeholders and beneficiaries. It is through their eyes that the UN’s record should be measured.

There are many ways in which the views of ordinary people are reflected at the UN, through governments, parliaments and the private sector for example, as well as through UN officials and experts. But it is often CSOs that are at the forefront of this work, standing up for the most vulnerable, for those unable to speak for themselves, and for those who are excluded, intentionally or otherwise, from formal processes.

CSOs engage with the UN in numerous ways, on the ground and at headquarters, and there are many excellent examples of CSO partnerships, such as the 2015 MyWorld survey which CSOs promoted widely to help almost 10 million people feed into the development of the SDGs.

Above: Civil society and the United Nations working together: A nurse from the CSO World Vision administers World Health Organization polio vaccinations to displaced children in South Darfur, April 2014.

“The UN must do all it can to protect, expand and in some cases, stem the shrinkage of civil society space both inside and outside the UN.”

However, the quality and impact of collaboration varies greatly, and there is still a long way to go to ensure that the voices of the most vulnerable are heard and that UN programmes are responsive to the needs of those they are intended to serve.

António Guterres took office on 1 January 2017 following the most open selection process in the UN's history, one that saw unprecedented engagement from civil society and the public. The process demonstrated – and stimulated – CSOs' desire for deeper inclusion in the UN's work.

But at this time of global uncertainty, the UN is stretched to the breaking point. More and more people are losing faith in institutions and political leadership, and nationalistic trends are presenting a grave challenge to the rules-based international system from which we all benefit. Public support for the UN is vital if a multilateral order is to be sustained, let alone deliver

ambitious agendas on development and climate.

The UN must do all it can to protect, expand and in some cases, stem the shrinkage of civil society space both inside and outside the UN. Determined work on this front will help the UN earn legitimacy with the 'peoples of the United Nations' and strengthen public understanding and support for the Organisation.

For these reasons, the UN cannot afford to miss opportunities to deepen engagement with civil society and harness the energy and capacity of those, such as 1 for 7 Billion's supporters, who want to work with the UN and rise to the challenge of securing a better world for us all.

A Champion of Civil Society

The UN's effectiveness is contingent on the trust placed in it by peoples and governments. As the Organisation's top diplomat and an international civil servant, the Secretary-General has an important role to play not only in leading the UN's programme of work, but also in improving public perceptions of the Organisation.

“Dialogue and cooperation with civil society will, I'm sure, be a central aspect of the activities of the UN in the next few years, not only because of my own activities, but because of the concerns that all the UN bodies have, making sure that partnership becomes a key element in solving global problems.”

António Guterres responds to a question from 1 for 7 Billion at an informal meeting of the General Assembly, October 2016



This means ensuring that the UN represents, as best it can, the hopes and needs of its primary stakeholders – the world’s seven billion people.

The more open, inclusive recruitment process has helped revitalise the UN, enhance its credibility, and reinvigorate its popular appeal. Having come through this new process gives the Secretary-General a mandate to lead on reforms relating to inclusivity and to capitalise on the widespread appetite for greater civil society and public participation in the UN system.

Proposals for Improved Civil Society Engagement

At present, substantial barriers remain to civil society participation at the UN. This publication, compiled by four of the 1 for 7 Billion campaign’s founding CSOs – the United Nations Association – UK, the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung New York Office,

CIVICUS and Avaaz – showcases articles from a diverse range of perspectives within 1 for 7 Billion’s community that outline practical proposals for improved civil society engagement at the UN.

The articles are not intended to be a comprehensive or representative reflection of the opinions of the world’s civil society, but rather a collection of perspectives from individual civil society organisations united by their aspiration to work productively alongside the UN in pursuit of common interests.

Whilst the collection touches on a variety of areas of the UN’s work, the span is by no means exhaustive. Despite this, we believe the publication highlights important areas of concern and makes a compelling case for improvements to the way the UN engages civil society.

We invite the Secretary-General to shine a light on this agenda and drive it forwards where possible, and encourage Member States and decision-makers to support Mr Guterres in his work.

Above: Candidates for the position of Secretary-General take questions from civil society at an event organised by the United Nations Association – UK and partners, London, June 2016.

A Committed and Determined Ally for the World's Most Impossible Job



Barbara Adams is Chair of the Board of Global Policy Forum. Previously she worked for the United Nations for 20 years, and with international civil society networks.

The UN Charter gives civil society organisations (CSOs) rights of consultation with Member States, but the rules and procedures needed to make this a reality have not kept pace with the myriad ways in which the UN system has grown, and the UN Secretariat has often been remiss in failing to take the lead and initiative to close this gap. Nevertheless, the UN 'system', however disjointed, has availed itself of the active engagement of CSOs as implementing partners in difficult situations and has benefitted from their energetic awareness-raising and outreach.

Such institutional leadership is especially important at a time when CSOs and social movements are experiencing restrictions and strong push-back in many national situations.

Many areas of CSO expertise and experience – in service provision, as human rights defenders, in solidarity at community level, a watchdog function, research and analysis, campaigning and, increasingly, data collection – are vital as the UN and its Member States seek to implement their commitments, including the recently adopted 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Much progress has been made in terms of regarding CSOs as an important constituency with their own accountability requirements and standards, not a pool from which to select individual talent. Still, the UN system has a tendency to pick and choose CSO engagement as fits its different agendas, which is not consistent with respecting the autonomy and self-organisation of CSOs, nor with respecting and supporting diversity of participation, perspectives and positions committed to the public sphere. However, it is this independence and autonomy that brings quality and durable support for UN values.

The UN is in danger of losing its unique value-based place among otherwise deal-making entities of multilateralism, and projecting the stodgy attributes of a pre-occupied, self-concerned bureaucracy – rather than that of a consistent champion of the public interest.

CSOs will be a consistent and constructively critical ally as the UN renews its determination to tackle the difficult and complex issues of sustainable development, peace and justice – and veers away from 'low-hanging fruit' and deal-making limited by powerful and narrow interests. CSOs are committed allies as the new Secretary-General Guterres steers the UN towards revitalising itself and re-claiming its value-based and premier role in multilateralism.

“CSOs are committed allies as the new Secretary-General Guterres steers the UN towards revitalising itself.”

Over the last few decades, CSO engagement with the UN has accumulated an impressive catalogue of good practices that give real meaning to their 'consultative' status. These range from participation in formal hearings to inclusion in expert meetings and in informal consultations among UN Member States. Yet the UN Secretariat has been slow to provide the institutional leadership that would enable CSOs to be an integral part of a coherent, value-based, people-and-planet-centred system – and reduce all parties' transaction costs.

For example, the Secretariat has not been a consistent and energetic advocate of CSO consultative status with the UN General Assembly beyond piecemeal, special-occasion resolutions. And engagement with the Security Council is on a grace-and-favour basis, and heavily skewed in favour of the well-resourced NGOs that can maintain a New York presence – a visa challenge as well as a financial one for many organisations.

While the informality of engagement has been a valuable component of building trust, it cannot be the only means of engagement.

Overcoming the Politics of the UN's NGO Committee

02

Eleanor Openshaw is Co-Director of the NY office of International Service for Human Rights (ISHR) and leads ISHR's work to promote NGO participation and protect civil society space at the UN.



Civil society is indispensable to the work of the United Nations. It contributes to discussions on international law and global rules and policies, and to working for their implementation. Although consultation with NGOs is recognised in the UN Charter, undue restrictions are being placed on the access to and participation of NGOs in the United Nations. One of the most egregious examples of this is through the ECOSOC Committee on NGOs (the NGO Committee).

The NGO Committee recommends approval of consultative status for non-governmental organisations, enabling access to and participation in a range of UN bodies and processes. Amongst the nineteen members of the Committee are states with some of the worst records on protecting civil society space.

Some states that fear organisations who provide an alternative narrative to their own will try to block them. Through multiple deferrals of applications, members of the NGO Committee can deny NGOs access to the UN. Human rights organisations are 50 per cent more likely to be blocked than others. Those working on the rights of Dalit communities, LGBTI people and migrants, as well as those working on sexual and reproductive rights and impunity are also at risk of being treated unfavourably. Multiple deferrals of applications on no reasonable basis is one controversial method used by members of the NGO committee of excluding organisations on political grounds.

The practice of the NGO Committee has been the focus of criticism by states, UN officials, UN independent experts and civil society members. Former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has noted 'a disturbing pattern of actions against NGOs whose work is essential to progress' around the world and 'even within the UN'. He has been clear in stating, '(w)e cannot allow this authoritarian impulse to silence NGOs'.

The UN should be a forum for airing diverse views. Through open debate the UN provides a vital forum for making advances on human rights protection and promotion and building consensus on issues considered controversial. For a small minority of Member States to

exclude the voices of certain marginalised groups from the UN on political grounds is illegitimate and counterproductive.

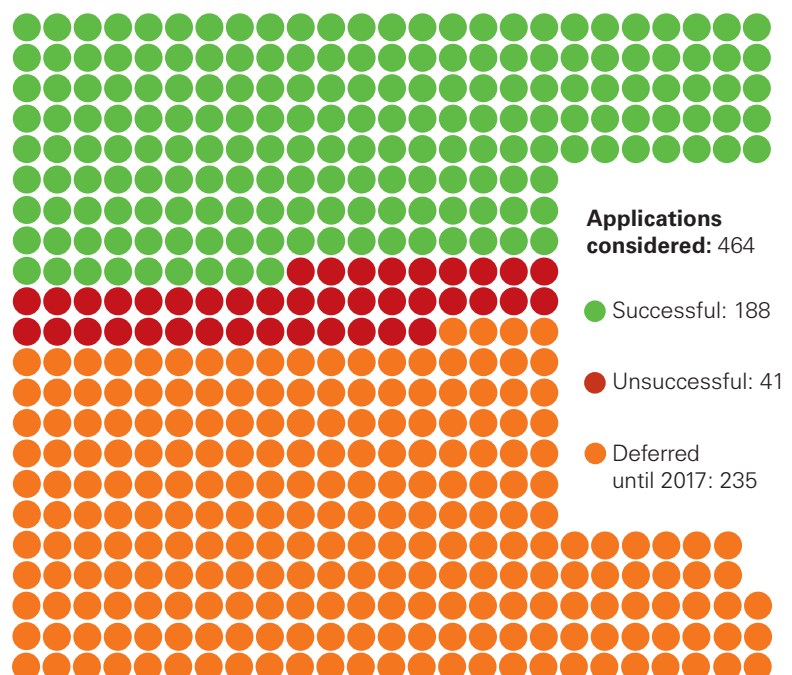
Fundamentally, we need to effect a change in culture whereby UN Member States acknowledge the value of the input and constructive criticism of civil society. Individuals' rights to access and communicate with UN bodies must be respected, safeguarded and encouraged.

A central part of this is ensuring transparency, consistency and impartiality in the work of the NGO Committee. Webcasting of its sessions and clearer criteria guiding the consideration of applications would be a key first step. States supportive of civil society engagement at the UN must also be prepared to put themselves forward as candidates for the NGO Committee.

The UN Secretary-General can set a tone and provide an important steer towards these objectives. In this regard, we call on the new Secretary-General to be a champion of civil society around the world and to commit to robustly defending and safeguarding NGOs' access to and participation in the UN system.

Barriers to participation

Many non-government organisations (NGOs) were denied consultative status during the NGO Committee's 23 May – 1 June 2016 session:



Young People Need a Seat at the Table of UN Climate Change Negotiations



Kazi Ateea is a youth climate change activist and co-signatory of new climate change campaign The Future Is Ours, calling for those with the biggest stake in the future to be represented at the table of negotiations in future climate change talks.

The time has come. COP22 has ended. But do those who take part in the climate talks understand what is at stake?

By the year 2050, my roots will be gone. Every day the island of Sandwip in Bangladesh breaks down a little more. Bangladesh is set to disappear by the end of the century. Rising sea levels, deadlier storms, increased health conditions – our world is falling apart. This is the reason for my passion. From a young age, I heard stories of the cyclone that destroyed my parents' homeland. It never came to mind, until recently, that we humans may have been the reason why this storm was so severe. And never before did I realise that I could play a part in changing the fate of this island and that of others.

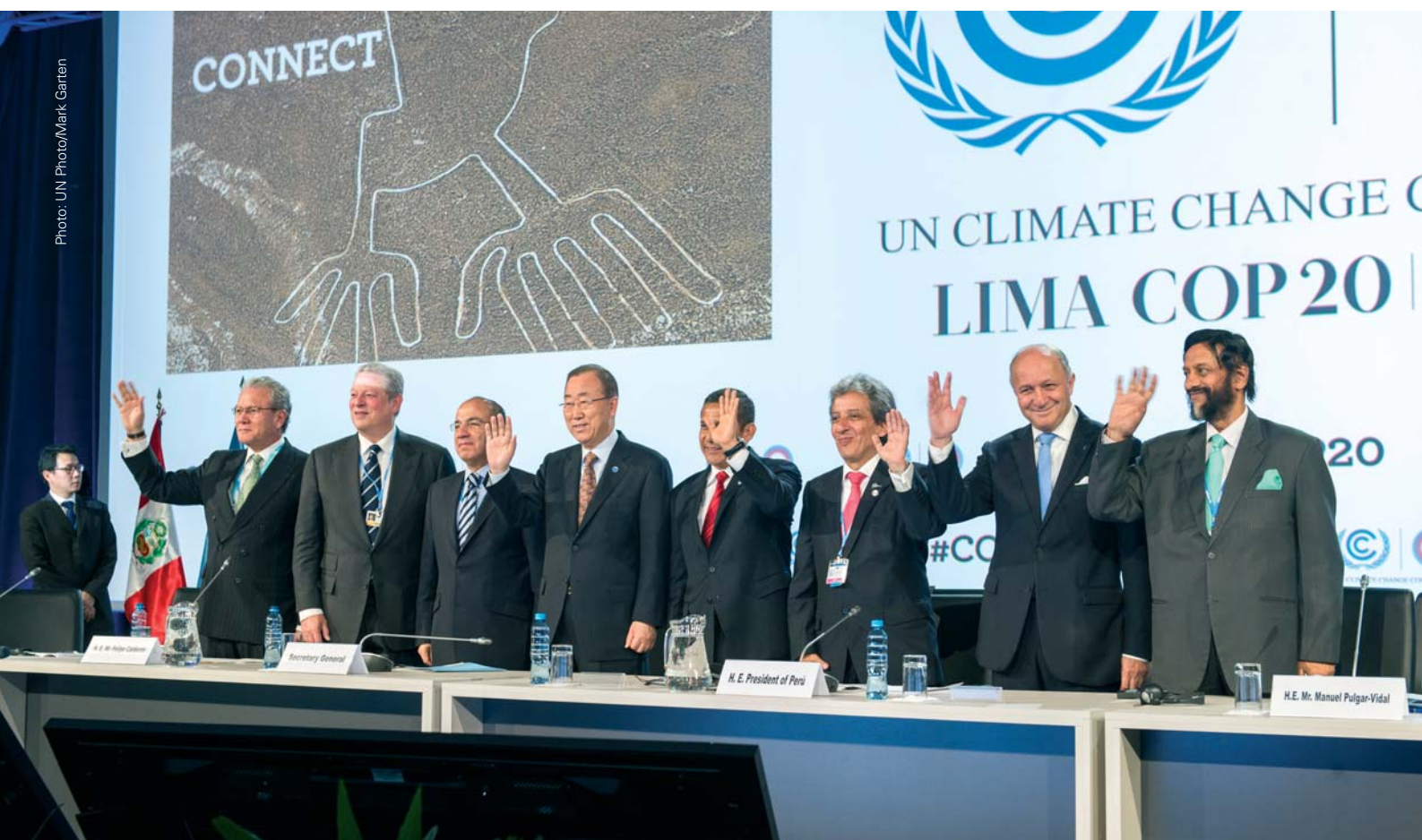
The future is ours, and truly it is. As millennials, we often think "How did we even end up here?" "How could previous generations put us in this situation, where they are killing our earth?" But it's difficult to question the choices of those in power

when the voices of young people are rarely heard. And in my experience, when I have been invited to the table to talk with heads of states, those in power are more concerned with hearing themselves talk than me. This can cause young people to lose faith in those who have power.

The Future Is Ours campaign plays a crucial role in advocating for youth voices to play an effective role during climate negotiations. The COYs (Conferences of Youth), sponsored by the UN one month prior to the COPs (Conferences of the Parties), have little influence on COP proceedings and run the risk of becoming the symbol of the patronising way young people's views and aspirations are separated and at times treated as a sideshow.

From what can be seen, young people who have been able to attend COPs are rarely allowed in the actual negotiation rooms, reinforcing the impression that youth voices are of little value.

Below: Former Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon with a group of participants from the Climate Action High-level Dialogue, taking place as part of the UN Climate Change Conference in Peru (COP20), December 2014.



As the UN Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth has said, "Space must be created to ensure the voices of young people are truly heard on the issue of climate change." Millennials need a formal seat at the table of future COP negotiations. This could be achieved by creating a symbolic new entity representing those under 30 and allowing them to take part in COP proceedings with the same status as country representatives.

The greatest risk to humans is humans and human-induced climate change. We've seen nations destroy themselves in massive civil wars. Climate change is the world's civil war. It is something that can still be stopped with immediate action but

"We've seen nations destroy themselves in massive civil wars. Climate change is the world's civil war."

politicians seem unwilling to do what is needed.

In fifty years, when Sandwip and other islands are under water, the people who are currently making decisions on behalf of us will not be here to see the results. We as millennials need to take the lead and change the direction in which we are headed. We must be the ones to say what happens. The time is now, and the future is ours.

Engaging Millennials Crucial to Achieving the UN's Ambitious Agenda

Noa Gafni Slaney is the founder and CEO of Impact Squared, a community-building consultancy. She is a Fellow of Social Innovation at the University of Cambridge.



Millennials are not alone in their desire to change the world. But understanding how they are distinct from previous generations is crucial if the UN is to engage and harness the capacity of this influential community in pursuit of ambitious UN initiatives like the SDGs and the Paris Climate Agreement.

Millennials are pragmatic. They have witnessed the failure of protest movements like Occupy Wall Street to achieve their aims, and instead are willing to work within existing systems to drive change. Millennials want to push business, government and institutions to do more, since there is a strong belief in the power of these systems to make an impact.

The UN could learn from initiatives such as the World Economic Forum's Global Shapers Community, a network of young leaders in city-based hubs around the world who cross-mentor each other and partner with established leaders to drive the social good agenda forward. Similar schemes for millennials to network and share their unique perspective and expertise with those in UN leadership positions could similarly help drive the UN's agenda forward.

There is also a feeling among young people that doing good should be fully integrated into their daily lives, from the

companies they work for to the products they purchase and the organisations they donate time, money or clicks to.

As a joint initiative of UNDP and the UN Foundation, +SocialGood taps into this desire to combine socialising with doing good by convening young people to take action towards the SDGs. The +SocialGood community gathers around major events, such as the opening of the General Assembly, in meetups around the world. Meetups vary from hackathons (intense problem-solving sessions) to livestreamed events with their appeal based on their solution-oriented approaches to global issues that also contain an element of fun. The UN should build on and highlight positive examples like +SocialGood, ensuring it harnesses such capacity where relevant.

As the first generation of digital natives, millennials are empowered by technology. Social media is the number one activity on the web and, for young people, it is the top source of news, the biggest influence on voting behaviour and the reason that millennials are more likely to give to global, as opposed to local, causes.

The ALS Ice Bucket Challenge is a great example of technological empowerment. Campaigners were recorded pouring icy water over themselves before posting the

Right: The ALS Ice Bucket Challenge is a great example of technological empowerment.



video on social media and nominating someone else for the challenge. The campaign went viral, raised over \$100 million and engaged leaders from all sectors and regions, from Bill Gates to Lei Jun. With the UN's resources stretched to breaking point, the Organisation should work with socially conscious millennials for innovative solutions to funding problems.

While there is much work required to reach those with little access to

technology, it is clear that a large proportion of millennials see the world differently and are well placed to play a major role helping address global problems. The UN's success will depend on engaging effectively with all age groups, online and offline; however, as a generation with a truly global mindset and one that is set to take leadership positions in the coming decade, engaging millennials will be crucial to achieving the SDGs.

05

Inclusiveness Is the Key to Implementing the SDGs



Farooq Ullah is a Director of Stakeholder Forum and Co-Chair of the UK Stakeholders for Sustainable Development – an open, multi-stakeholder platform that supports public, private and voluntary organisations working towards sustainable development in the UK.

The process to establish the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the associated Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) was one of the most inclusive in humanity's history. With participation, transparency and multi-stakeholderism – effective collaboration between government, civil society and the

private sector – riding high throughout the negotiations, the resulting SDGs can rightly be held up as an example of inclusive policy-making.

As we now switch gears towards implementation of the SDGs (and the Paris climate deal) it is necessary to replicate this esprit de corps at the regional,

national and local levels where implementation truly takes form.

It is clear that public policy alone will be insufficient to achieve the SDGs. But while most stakeholders, including civil society, will likely see their missions reflected in the SDGs, do we have the right processes and mechanisms in place to allow them to meaningfully engage?

The SDGs provide two key operational principles: those of Universality and Leaving No One Behind. How to embody these principles in practice is both unclear and challenging.

Multi-stakeholderism offers a means by which these ambitious principles can be realised as well as ensuring that efforts are coordinated and productive.

But there must be alignment between global goals and local action. As resources for sustainable development are scarce, the need to be both effective and efficient is greater than ever. Each country will want to approach this task in its own way. But some key elements will need to be addressed everywhere. At the national and local levels we must now:

- Improve government and legislative machinery for sustainable development;
- Model new and better processes for engaging all international and domestic stakeholders;
- Create or renew national sustainable development strategies or frameworks in light of the SDGs;
- Review policies and programmes in the SDGs, including the application of green economy principles and instruments for domestic resource mobilisation; and

- Deliver formal and informal education, public awareness and capacity building training.

Multi-stakeholder models being pursued on this basis should be encouraged, as should shared learning between initiatives that follow this approach, such as the UK Stakeholders for Sustainable Development (UKSSD).

The UN can show leadership on multi-stakeholder action by advocating the establishment and resourcing of:

- Stronger and more formal mechanisms for including non-governmental stakeholders in the delivery of the SDGs, and
- Regular, transparent and inclusive reporting mechanisms including civil society, in order to consider how both official and stakeholder-held non-official data can be collected and reported on.

In a time of seismic socio-economic shifts coupled with a growing sense of protectionism and tribalism, we need a positive vision for the future that people can get behind. The SDGs offer a common global framework for a fair and green future for our world, through which all stakeholders, if well-coordinated, can play their part in responding to global challenges.

By highlighting best practices of cooperation between governments, the private sector and civil society in the creation of the SDGs, the UN can facilitate the latter's involvement in the implementation of the SDGs and in this way contribute effectively to this ambitious agenda.

Below: Rally in New York calling on world leaders to raise their ambitions as the UN Sustainable Development Goals are adopted at the United Nations, September 2015.



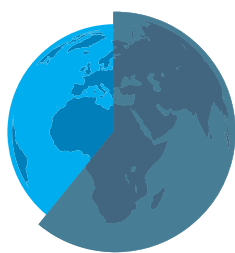
Online & on the Ground: Connecting Those Most in Need with the UN



Aya Chebbi is the founding Chair of the African Youth Movement, a renowned blogger and an award-winning pan-African feminist activist. She is also a board member of CIVICUS, world alliance for citizen participation.

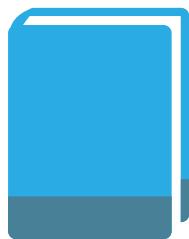
The distance between the UN Headquarters in New York and my hometown in Tunisia has shrunk over the past two decades. Today, in the age of laptops and mobile data, the United Nations feels more accessible, but many in the global South are still unable to participate.

When the United Nations was designing the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in the late 1990s, the public had little say in the process. Fifteen years later, thanks largely to the internet and online consultations, over nine million individuals were able to engage in setting priorities for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).



61% of the world's population is offline

21% of the offline population is illiterate



Source: Offline and falling behind: Barriers to Internet adoption, McKinsey&Company, August 2014.

Before the SDGs, the UN all too often only heard from large, well-resourced organisations, which may not reflect the reality at a community level, while the voices of the citizens who are most in need are not heard. But this new agenda provides an opportunity to re-balance power relations between civil society in the global North and South.

The UN is not just responsible for presiding over the SDGs, it has to implement them internally as well. Goal 16 on peace, justice and inclusive institutions contains objectives for democratising UN decision-making processes, making them more representative of the global South:

- 16.6 Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels

- 16.7 Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels

To achieve these targets, the UN needs to embrace the digital age with an emphasis on “leaving no one behind”.

The first aspect of this is to provide simplified information via the UN website, such as accessible versions of key UN documents that can be downloaded on a phone. Better use of infographics to help the public better understand UN policy programmes would also help.

But online support is only part of the solution. There remains a major digital divide globally, with 60 per cent of the world offline, the vast majority in Central Africa, Southeast Asia and the Middle East. As a result, a considerable amount of indigenous and traditional knowledge from communities off the grid is not captured in intergovernmental processes.

To bridge this gap and connect rural communities to the World Wide Web, the SDGs aim to “provide universal and affordable internet access to the least developed countries by 2020”. In terms of infrastructure, the UN should encourage governments to scale up internet provision, improve internet literacy and prioritise mobile access for those who are in remote areas. We learned in 2011, during Tunisia’s historic political transition to democracy, that digital tools have become fundamental in mobilising the masses to take a stand on social, economic and environmental issues.

But it cannot stop there. To reach those most in need, with no imminent hope of entering the digital age, the UN must provide better support to bring the voices of civil society directly from grassroots organisations. On this front, the UN should ensure timely announcements of meetings and make more travel grants accessible to those who are ‘off-grid’ as well as working with host countries to ease the often-restrictive visa processes that attendees face. Only by enabling a platform for the hardest-to-reach voices can the UN ensure that it truly reflects the needs of the world’s seven billion people.

Civil Society Remains Vital to Success of Arms Control Processes

07

Robert Perkins is a researcher with the Control Arms Secretariat, working on the Arms Trade Treaty Monitor project. He has worked across a range of arms control issues, including explosive weapons in populated areas.



Civil society has played a critical role in the rapid developments in arms control over the past two decades. From the agreement of global bans on antipersonnel landmines and cluster munitions, to the first legally binding international instrument to regulate the trade in conventional arms and ammunition, to the recent UN vote to begin work toward a ban on nuclear weapons, civil society has been at the heart of all recent civilian protection initiatives.

The Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) was achieved through a partnership between progressive governments and global civil society from all regions of the world, mobilised by the Control Arms Coalition. Throughout the ATT's development, civil society contributed a wealth of experience and expertise across many fields including the areas of human rights, gender, public health, and conflict reduction, as well as bringing the voices of armed-violence survivors to the centre of States' discussions.

Following the ATT's entry into force in 2014, the focus has turned to supporting universalisation and implementation. Civil society participation on this front continues to be critical, as multi-stakeholder partnerships are a vital means of sharing knowledge and expertise, as well as building collective capacity within decision-making infrastructure such as the annual Conferences of States Parties (CSPs).

Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) had to fight for access to CSP proceedings, campaigning successfully for some meetings to be "open" instead of "closed" and building support among States willing to champion such provisions. However, current levels of participation in ATT fora should not be taken for granted, given the concerning signs that the hard-won access could be withdrawn in the future.

Monitoring ATT implementation necessitates critical analysis of government behaviour – not blanket support. This means confrontational work

at times and already, some States, notably European exporters, have started to push for a more closed process and attempted to undermine the input of CSOs.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon was a supporter of civil society participation throughout the ATT negotiation process. By identifying himself as a vocal champion for inclusivity, the incoming Secretary-General can build on the work of his predecessors and be influential in ensuring that ATT procedures remain accessible.

Other UN arms control processes, such as the Conference on Disarmament, have been more restrictive, and, by limiting civil society participation, combined with decision-making processes that rarely allow progress, have consequently suffered a lack of legitimacy, public interest and support.

The Secretary-General should make a positive case for better access to all disarmament and arms control processes and fora. This should include recognition of the role played by international coalitions in bringing together civil society groups across the world, especially the global South, and advocacy for their continued support in representing their members at UN and other international meetings.

“The Secretary-General should make a positive case for better access to all disarmament and arms control processes and fora.”

Civil society, with its wide-ranging expertise and its representation of diverse global views, is critical in ensuring accountability, rigour and transparency across international arms control processes. Strong norms must be established to safeguard such inclusion that, ultimately, will lead to more robust arms control mechanisms providing meaningful protection of civilians worldwide.

Gender Considerations for the New Secretary-General



Melina Lito is a Program Officer with Equality Now. She is an international human rights lawyer with experience in international security and justice and US immigration law.

Right: UN Women Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka meets UN Women Country and Regional Staff in Cairo, February 2015.



Photo: UN Women Egypt/Mohamed Ezz Aldin

As an international human rights organisation working to protect the rights of women and girls, Equality Now first launched its campaign for a woman Secretary-General about 20 years ago. Concerned that in the 70-year history of the UN there still has not been a woman Secretary-General, the organisation renewed this campaign in 2015, noting the many qualified female candidates who could be appointed to the position and the need for a transparent selection process.

The campaign was also grounded on the underrepresentation of women within the UN itself. For the past decade, according to UN Women, only 24.6 per cent of the highest positions at the organisation have been filled by women. Yet in 1995, at the UN Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, 189 governments called for the development of “mechanisms to nominate women candidates for appointment to senior posts in the United Nations”. The year 2000 was set as the target date for “overall gender equality, particularly at the Professional level and above”.

While we were disappointed that a woman was not selected in the end, we encourage the incoming Secretary-General to become an unswerving supporter of a feminist agenda, including by ensuring gender parity among staff and prioritising the prevention of violence and discrimination against women and girls around the world. Along these lines, civil society organisations released a statement proposing minimum steps for Mr Guterres’ first 100 days towards what we think should be his feminist agenda.

At its heart, the declaration makes the case for gender parity across the UN system, calling on the Secretary-General to:

- commit to establishing gender parity among his staff and across the Secretariat, i.e. in the Senior Management Group, in the members of the Policy Committee and in the members of the Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB).
- fulfil the commitment made at the World Humanitarian Summit in May 2016 by the UN Deputy Secretary-General to ramp up action on gender equality by increasing the percentage of women at all levels in the United Nations, seeking to surpass 40 percent by 2020 and achieve 50 percent by 2030.
- put in place a plan, timeline, budget and accountability mechanism for all senior leaders for achieving gender parity in senior appointments across the entire UN.

The statement further highlights the need to strengthen financing for gender equality and improved coordination through UN Women, ensuring that the agency is informed and engaged in decision-making processes across the UN’s activities.

As the Secretary-General takes office, the need for UN leadership on women’s rights is a must. This includes the improvements needed to incorporate better civil society voices working on gender issues, including in the highest policy forums. But, at a time when the political pushback against women’s rights will only increase, supporting women’s civil society voices also includes the UN showing leadership with Member States and their commitments to champion these issues within the Sustainable Development Goals and existing UN human rights frameworks.

The Role of Civil Society in Enhancing the Peacebuilding Commission

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Rachel Madenyika is a UN Representative at the Quaker United Nations Office in New York, where she leads the work on the prevention of violent conflict.



The new Secretary-General is entering the UN at a time that requires crucial decisions for peacebuilding. The UN has responded to the increase in conflict and insecurity throughout the world by acknowledging that peacebuilding needs to take place before, during and after the outbreak of conflict. Such a shift within the UN towards 'sustaining peace' recognises the primacy of politics while also stressing an approach that links security, development and human rights. This new concept, together with the peace mandate of the 2030 Agenda, could help reorient the UN's efforts to sustain peace and accomplish the spirit of the UN Charter.

To do this, the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) needs to be strengthened. The PBC was initially set up in 2005 to be more creative and flexible compared to, for instance, the Security Council. It was intended as a body to propose and advise on integrated peacebuilding approaches, and push forward action to reconstruct societies and their institutions in the aftermath of conflict. While acknowledging that civil society is not monolithic, the UN's peacebuilding work would benefit from more systematic engagement with

civil society. Indeed, the inclusion of diverse sources of civil society expertise is crucial to ensuring the success of the renewed UN peacebuilding approach.

First, to effectively fulfil its mission, the PBC must measure its success through its impact on the people it seeks to support, and involve civil society. This requires strategies and practices both at headquarters and at the country level, engaging with a range of perspectives. On this front, the PBC should establish a strategy to create feedback loops for civil society monitoring and assessments of its activities both in New York and in country.

Second, civil society can play a crucial role in the design, implementation and evaluation of peacebuilding projects funded by the UN Peacebuilding Fund. To facilitate this, the Peacebuilding Fund should continue the trend that began in 2016 with the broadening of funding eligibility to incorporate the direct funding of international NGOs. This initiative should be expanded by increasing the capacity of local organisations to apply for such funding, since they are best placed to guide the UN on the local needs and context.

Below: Security Council Considers Report of Peacebuilding Commission 682536" with the caption: "Security Council Considers Report of Peacebuilding Commission, New York, June 2016.



Photo: UN Photo/Evan Schneider

“It is a rare occasion that a major UN member state body has the opportunity to reinvent itself.”

Third, the most powerful lever of the PBC is its convening power. The PBC can enhance its effectiveness by including different perspectives, approaches and feedback from the communities that are most impacted by its work. The PBC could be more systematic in including civil society in its activities, and provide greater transparency to its work by providing more notice of PBC meeting dates and making

preparatory documents available to civil society.

It is a rare occasion that a major UN member state body has the opportunity to reinvent itself. It is clear that strengthened and institutionalised engagement with civil society will be required as the PBC takes the next steps towards implementing the new ‘sustaining peace’ agenda. By supporting more effective civil society involvement, the new Secretary-General can enhance the role of the PBC as a place where longer-term national and regional strategies for sustainable peace are articulated, refined, implemented and supported.

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Persons with Disabilities and the United Nations System



Vladimir Cuk is the Executive Director of the International Disability Alliance (IDA), Primary Representative of the Disability Stakeholder Group and Co-Chair of the Major Groups and Other Stakeholders High-Level Political Forum Coordination Mechanism.

Persons with disabilities comprise an estimated 15 percent of the world’s population and are overrepresented among those living in absolute poverty. Encountering pervasive exclusion in society, persons with disabilities are further impacted by multiple forms of discrimination. Such exclusion and inequality, however, has invigorated the global disability rights movement to work tirelessly to address such discrimination.

One transformative achievement for the disability community has been the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), adopted in 2006. The CRPD represented a fundamental shift in how persons with disabilities were regarded, moving away from a medical view of disability towards a human rights approach. Uniquely providing both a human rights and development framework, the CRPD redefined what it means to build truly inclusive and sustainable societies, laying the groundwork for future advocacy. As a result, the 2030 Agenda, which has placed the principle of “leave no one behind” at its core, explicitly included for the first time the rights of persons with disabilities as a central issue in development. With such explicit references, the 2030 Agenda, like

the CRPD, has opened the doors for our equal participation and has enabled us to start addressing the institutional, attitudinal and legal barriers that have inhibited our full participation within human rights and development dialogues.

The participation and contribution of persons with disabilities in both the UN CRPD and the 2030 Agenda have exemplified the impact and positive contribution that civil society can make within the UN system. But this was not without its challenges. While Major Groups had been recognised since 1992, additional space for civil society actors was limited until 2012, when additional stakeholders were recognised by Member States. Throughout this time, and since then, persons with disabilities have been one of the leading stakeholder groups advocating for the increased inclusion of all civil society, not only themselves.

Persons with disabilities created an organised, representative and coordinated platform: the Stakeholder Group of Persons with Disabilities, which aims to uphold the CRPD in the UN’s sustainable development processes.

While more space has been granted to civil society, it requires the consistent



Photo: UN Photo/Fardin Waezi

advocacy of stakeholders to maintain it. For persons with disabilities, our inclusion and meaningful engagement is mandated within CRPD Article 4.3, which requires States Parties to closely consult with persons with disabilities in the development and implementation of policies, and in decision-making processes that impact their lives. We continue to advocate for this principle to be applied across the entire UN system by recommending the following:

- Increasing the accessibility of the UN at all levels for persons with disabilities, including by means of closed captioning and International Sign, as well as accessible communication systems and materials.
- Considering disability in any UN process that requires gender and geographical balance.
- Increasing the systematic inclusion of the rights and participation of persons with disabilities in the UN Development System's operational activities at all levels.
- Mandating Resident Coordinators to appoint disability focal points in each UN Country Team.

“Our inclusion and meaningful engagement is mandated within CRPD Article 4.3, which requires States Parties to closely consult with persons with disabilities.”

- Investing by the UN Development System in the capacity of National Statistical Offices to collect and disaggregate data by disability.
- Increasing the support, funding and visibility of the United Nations Partnership to Promote the Rights of Persons with Disability (UNPRPD).

The space for collaboration with the UN and larger civil society networks contributed to the success that persons with disabilities have achieved. Persons with disabilities hope that the leadership of the Secretary-General of the United Nations will guarantee and further open space for the effective and meaningful participation of all civil society in today's challenging era.

Above: Afghans gather to celebrate the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, Kabul, Afghanistan, December 2010.

Historic Civil Society Participation in General Assembly Hearings with UN Secretary-General Candidates



Volker Lehmann is a Senior Policy Analyst with the New York office of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. He focuses on the UN's role in international peace and security and on UN reform. He was a member of the NGLS civil society committee.

“The hearings became widely regarded as perhaps the most honest, open exchange about the role of the Secretary-General and the UN that the world body had ever seen.”

When the General Assembly took the historic decision to hold the first ever hearings with all candidates for the post of Secretary-General, many observers expected a dreadful exchange of prefabricated slogans. Instead, the hearings, which started in April 2016, became widely regarded as perhaps the most honest, open exchange about the role of the Secretary-General and the UN that the world body had ever seen.

A significant contribution to the selection process' increased transparency was the questions put by NGOs from all over the world to all candidates. The President of the General Assembly had agreed to make these interventions a short, yet constituent, part of all candidate hearings. NGO participation was facilitated by a civil society committee balanced in respect to gender and region – organised by the UN Non-Governmental Liaison Service (NGLS) – that made pre-selections from among the over 1,500 civil society questions submitted from 100 countries. As a result, during their dialogue with General Assembly members, each candidate was presented with two to three civil society questions by pre-recorded video message.

Civil society participation in the selection process has established an important precedent. But there is more to be learned from this exercise:

First, regarding the selection of the civil society questions, the crowd wisdom of the 22 civil society committee members managed to balance representativeness and the selection of pertinent content. Yet this also came at the price of a certain level of self-censorship: Future debates would profit if civil society concentrated on raising issues that Member States would be unlikely to cover or do not dare to address themselves.

Second, technology can help in overcoming distances, language barriers and other divisions, but only to a point. The pre-recorded video messages helped bring voices to the UN with relatively little effort. But these questions, which had to be submitted and filmed beforehand, took away the spontaneity and they are no substitute for a genuine debate on the spot. The UN should further explore the many novel methods of interaction that communication technologies present. For instance, the UK Mission collected civil society questions via Twitter and then addressed some of them to the candidates. This could be done by the UN Secretariat as the conference convener in many of its future UN hearings, as well as in anticipated hearings with Secretary-General candidates.

Third, the standing of NGLS within the UN system has always been indicative of the general state of the UN-civil society relationship. Civil society participation in the Secretary-General hearings profited from the experience that NGLS had built up funnelling civil society participation into the deliberations for the 2030 Agenda. Nevertheless, NGLS's financial and institutional standing remains in peril and could deteriorate further without strong support from Member States and the Secretariat.

While constantly pushing the envelope and moving towards constructive involvement for the greater global good, in the end CSOs cannot do it alone. The proactive role of the President of the 70th General Assembly, Mogens Lykketoft, proved crucial in creating transparent candidate hearings with civil society input. Secretary-General Guterres could seize upon the worldwide interest in his selection that global civil society took and invite them to become an integral part of broad coalitions to reinvigorate the UN and tackle the huge challenges ahead.

Appointment of UNHCR Chief and Other Senior Roles Could Learn from Recent UNSG Process

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Nan Buzard is Executive Director of the International Council of Voluntary Agencies. She also has experience with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, American Red Cross, UNHCR and various other non-government and private sector organisations.



In 2016, for the first time there were significant improvements in the transparency of the process to select a new UN Secretary-General and the WHO Director-General. This has not always been the case when filling leadership posts in the UN, as demonstrated by the largely closed-door nomination and selection process for the post of UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

After a closed process in 2000 with no official opportunity for input from NGOs, in 2005, efforts to take a new approach to appointing the High Commissioner were welcomed by civil society. The UN Secretariat sent letters to governments and notably also some NGOs, asking for nominations with a list of criteria to guide nominations.

The International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) sought to complement the process from the outside by writing to known candidates with a questionnaire, giving candidates a platform to present their vision for the role, with the results published online. While this initiative was hampered by the absence of a public list of candidates, meaning that civil society could only engage those announced by their governments or heard of informally, the success of the exercise made it clear that there was a willingness from candidates to participate in such an initiative.

During the run-up to the 2015 UNHCR appointment, a similar ICVA initiative met with an additional obstacle – a lack of support from the UN Secretariat, who justified their opposition on the grounds of confidentiality, citing a 2012 General Assembly resolution containing guidance on the appointment of senior managers. This development was unfortunate given that the majority of known candidates were keen to participate – indicating a comfort with, and expectation of, such public discourse.

Senior UN appointment processes including the UNHCR would benefit from the sort of gains in transparency and civil society participation witnessed in the recent Secretary-General and WHO Director-General appointment processes. Recommendations for UN action on this front should include the following:

- Candidacies for USG, DSG and Secretary-General positions should be made public along with a requirement that candidates provide written and oral vision statements
- Candidates should be encouraged to answer questions posed by relevant civil society organisations with knowledge of the issues related to the agency/position
- Qualified candidates should be able to demonstrate their advocacy for and their work with civil society on issues of concern

As the UN seeks to reassert its values and value, the demand for trust and transparency is at an all-time high. People around the world are seeking what is real and true. A transparent process does not contradict the role of management or of a selection committee but rather provides important additional scrutiny and credibility.

In a world with new threats and increasing instability, the UN needs the best leaders and managers. Initiating clear, open discussion between candidates and the public they serve will contribute to the identification and hiring of the most qualified candidates.

The 2017 creation of the Secretary-General's Executive Committee, along with its commitment to maximising the impact on public perception and generating coherence across the UN system, provides a strong basis for furthering the regularisation of transparent recruitment processes for senior positions.

Supporting Civil Society across the UN System and Beyond



Ben Donaldson is Head of Campaigns at the United Nations Association – UK, a co-founder of the 1 for 7 Billion campaign. His focus is on UN reform and UK-UN relations.

CSOs have become indispensable across the UN's broad spectrum of work – from service provision to contributing to major policy initiatives like the SDGs. Yet, deeper engagement with civil society will be essential if the UN is to deliver its ambitious agenda at a time of grave challenges to the international system. As Secretary-General Guterres said in late 2016: cooperation between the UN and civil society must become “a key element in solving global problems”.

The UN needs to take action on two fronts to realise this vision. Firstly, there must be concerted support to help protect civic space outside the UN. According to UN Special Rapporteur Maina Kiai, the past decade has seen an “unprecedented wave of repressive laws and practices sweep across the world” designed to silence those who dare to speak out. Civic space is shrinking fast and, given the importance placed on civil society by the UN, the Organisation must do all it can to champion the protection, reopening and expansion of civic space.

political and financial will than a lack of ideas.

Reform initiatives such as the 2003-04 Panel of Eminent Persons on UN-Civil Society Relations have yielded some compelling proposals that remain unimplemented, including those relating to coordination across the UN system. For over 40 years, this role has largely fallen to the UN Non-Governmental Liaison Service (NGLS) – a voluntarily funded, inter-agency programme that operates on a shoestring, currently administered by the Secretariat of the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in Geneva.

Despite punching above its weight, for a body like NGLS to play an effective system-wide coordination role would require an appropriate and secure funding stream as well as improved institutional standing.

The Secretary-General's new-look Executive Office, with its emphasis on coherence and coordination, offers a promising opportunity to reinvigorate reform here. An early priority should be the appointment or designation of a senior official as a system-wide focal point to lead a partnerships unit with the institutional status and funding necessary to mainstream civil society engagement across the UN. The System Wide Action Plans on Youth and Gender could provide some inspiration on this front.

Sustained support from Member States will be critical in order to make such reforms effective. Part of this will be identifying and working with those states willing to lead the march for civil society – not least to ensure that institutional arrangements have the necessary financial backing.

By supporting this agenda, and driving it forward where possible, Secretary-General Guterres could put the UN in a better position to capitalise on the unique energy and expertise that civil society has to offer in pursuit of our shared aspirations for a peaceful future.

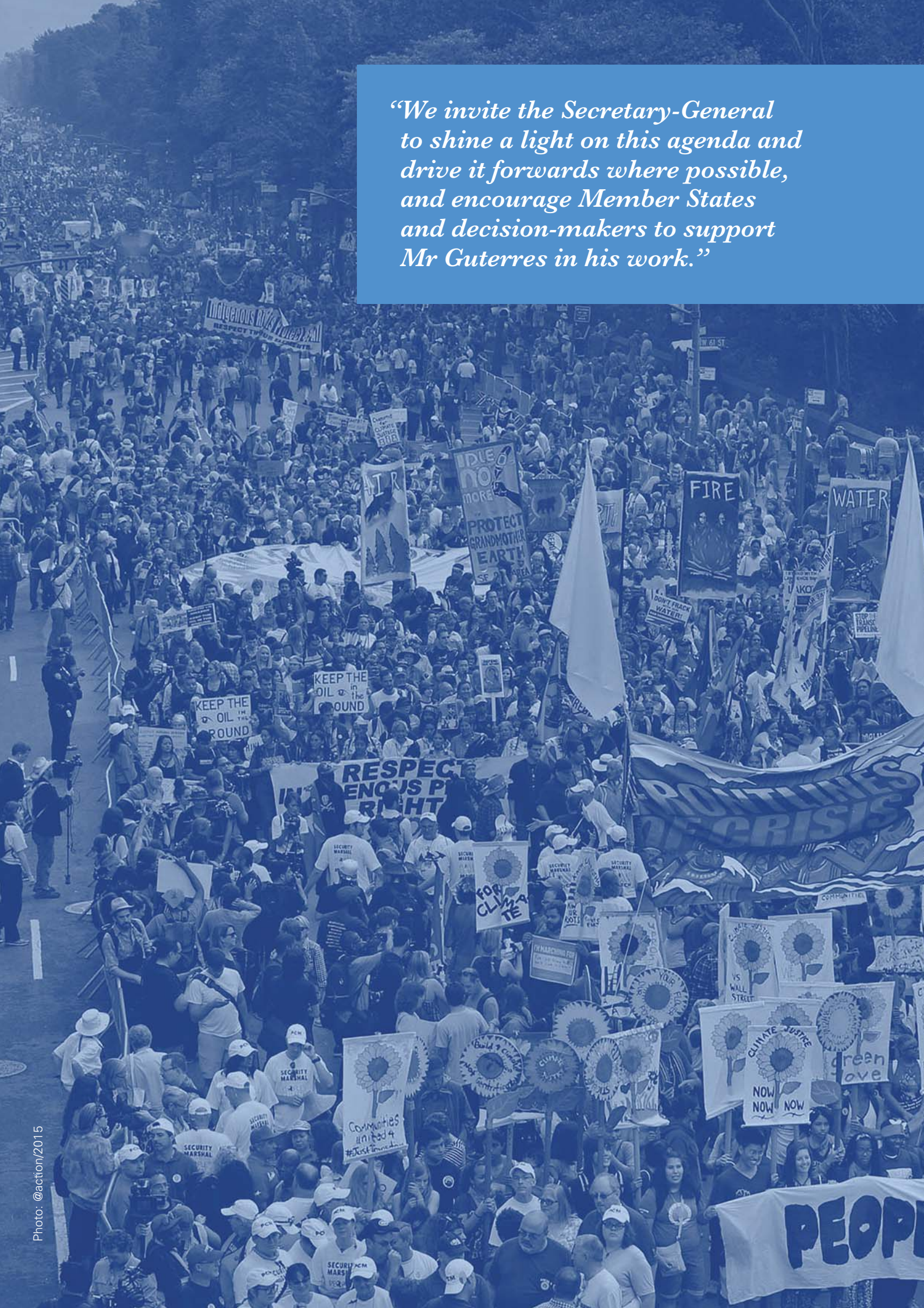
“Deeper engagement with civil society will be essential if the UN is to deliver its ambitious agenda at a time of grave challenges to the international system.”

Action from the Secretary-General can help here. By identifying himself early on as an energetic advocate for the rights of civil society actors, and advocating greater support for the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights' work on this front, Mr Guterres can promote good practice and stimulate debate between Member States on this issue.

Secondly, improvements within the UN are needed in order to better coordinate civil society cooperation across an organisation whose size, complexity and remit has increased dramatically since its founding. Progress here has been thwarted in the past more by a lack of

Next page: The People's Climate March in New York attracted nearly 400,000 people making it the largest climate march in history, September 2014.

“We invite the Secretary-General to shine a light on this agenda and drive it forwards where possible, and encourage Member States and decision-makers to support Mr Guterres in his work.”



This publication was co-compiled by four founding members of the 1 for 7 Billion campaign: the United Nations Association – UK, the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung New York Office, CIVICUS and Avaaz. The recommendations contained within this publication are those of the individual contributors, rather than 1 for 7 Billion or the publication's co-compilers. They reflect key principles for UN cooperation with civil society which we support.

The publication was co-edited by Ben Donaldson, Volker Lehmann and Yvonne Terlingen. For more information please contact info@una.org.uk.

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Cover photo: Participants arrive in Mexico City for the 62nd annual UN Department of Public Information (DPI) and Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) Conference. The meeting focused on disarmament took place in September 2009. Photo: UN Photo/Evan Schneider

