

UN-NGO COOPERATION

WORLD BANK CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM

A joint resolution between the World Bank and the NGO Working Group says that an Annual World Bank-Civil Society Forum will be established. The Forum is expected to provide a key opportunity for dialogue between the Bank and civil society on specific topics. It will convene, among others, representatives of NGOs, trade unions, community organizations, religious groups and women's organizations. During the December 2000 NGO World Bank Committee meeting it was decided that the Forum, which will replace the annual Committee meeting in Washington DC, will have its first meeting in late 2001.

In order to assist organization of the Annual Forum, a Joint Facilitation Committee will be created. During the first half of 2001, the NGO Working Group will advise the Bank on the role of the Committee, its functions, size, structure, and criteria for selection of its civil society members. The Committee is expected to be established no later than 30 June 2001, and

its membership will include the Chair of the NGO Working Group as well as two other representatives of the Group.

The Annual Forum initiative came in response to the ever-expanding and evolving relationship of the Bank and civil society. Over the years, the dialogue has decentralized significantly and grown to include a myriad of discussions on an ad-hoc basis. It has also resulted in an expansion of policy dialogue and consultation with NGOs beyond the realm of the Committee. Consequently, numerous NGOs and members of civil society have questioned the centralized system of World Bank-NGO relations for global policy dialogue. They have also been eager to ensure the strengthening of local and national interaction, and to increase opportunities for civil society organizations from the South to participate in the policy issues dialogue.

Taking into account the changing relationship between the Bank and civil society, in late 2000 the Working Group submitted a detailed proposal to the

"This Valentine's Day, American consumers across the country will be purchasing symbols of love and devotion in the form of diamond rings, pins, earrings, necklaces, and bracelets. But in Sierra Leone, there is nothing to celebrate on Valentine's Day. The brutal insurgent movement, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), continues to occupy over two-thirds of the country, including most of the country's rich diamond beds. The RUF's mining and sale of diamonds pays for its weapons and keeps it in power. RUF atrocities against unarmed men, women, and children continue, including the enslavement of child soldiers; rape and sexual violence against women, girls, and boys; and the amputation of limbs of adults and children. In recent months, the RUF's abuses have spilled across the border into neighbouring Guinea, which is home to hundreds of thousands of refugees, with the RUF conducting cross-border raids, wounding and killing civilians in the process."

"It is essential that the world trade in 'conflict diamonds' from Sierra Leone (as well as from Angola and the Democratic Republic of Congo) end immediately so that abusive forces, deprived of diamond proceeds, will wither away."

—Physicians for Human Rights
Statement on Valentine's Day
14 February 2001

Speakers on a panel concerning land rights and rights to resources said the root cause of conflicts in indigenous territories was the rights to, and utilization of, these resources. They noted that such conflicts could be traced back to colonization, whose impact is still felt today. Speakers said that conflict over land and resources was due to a basic contradiction between the Western perception of property rights regimes, and indigenous beliefs and practices concerning resource management. They said the principle of self-determination should be the guiding light in any effort to resolve conflict over indigenous peoples' land and resources.

During a panel on self-determination, it was argued that this is both an end and means to peace-building in indigenous peoples' territories. Speakers proposed varied means through which this fundamental right might be expressed including secession in the case of the Mindanao in the Philippines, home-rule for the Inuit in Greenland, autonomy for the Archauco in Colombia, and independence for the Aceh in Indonesia.

A panel on liberation movements and post-conflict reconstruction addressed the links between movements for national liberation and those for indigenous peoples. Examples cited included the national democratic movement in the Philippines and the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa. Speakers advised indigenous peoples to invoke their right to self-determination even within the framework of national liberation movements.

During a panel on negotiating gender in conflict resolution and peace-building, indigenous women gave their views on conflict resolution and depicted women as active agents of peace processes.

A panel on indigenous definitions of identities, conflicts, conflict resolution and sustainable development underscored traditional mechanisms for resolving conflict, and the ways in which meaning is given to those mechanisms in the context of culture and as expressed in language, ritual, folk beliefs and place.

In a panel on the role of civil society, donor agencies and multilateral organizations in conflict resolution and peace-building, speakers said in situations where the state becomes a party to conflict the role of civil society, the UN and other international bodies becomes crucial. They can help create conditions for the parties to sit down and negotiate. The function of such agencies, speakers said, was facilitation, moderation, conciliation, mediation and arbitration.

A declaration entitled "We Will Keep the Past Not Behind Us But in Front of Us!" includes the following commitments.

- Create an Independent International Commission of Indigenous Peoples for Mediation and Conflict

Resolution no later than 2002. Its mission would be to promote and defend the rights of indigenous peoples, and expose and denounce aggression and abuses of the rights of indigenous peoples in different parts of the world.

- Create an Indigenous Peoples Global Network for Research, aimed at supporting and strengthening the capacities of indigenous peoples to undertake research and documentation and disseminate information as widely as possible.
- Strengthen indigenous global, regional and local networks and collaboration in education, campaign, and policy advocacy.
- Build partnerships with the media, academia, civil society organizations, NGOs and others to promote public understanding of the issues facing indigenous peoples, as well as peace building and solidarity.

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CAMPAIGN AGAINST "CONFLICT DIAMONDS"

Frustrated by delays in international action to ban "conflict diamonds," over 70 United States-based human rights, humanitarian and development NGOs launched a campaign on 14 February 2001 calling on the US Congress to enact legislation that will subject imported diamonds to tight controls.

The campaign, led by Physicians for Human Rights, World Vision, Oxfam America and Amnesty International USA, is promoting the "Clean Diamonds Act" to give exporting countries a year to comply with the Kimberly Standards (or "rough standards"), a certification system endorsed by the UN General Assembly in December 2000 (see *Go Between* 84). This aims to make it difficult for diamonds mined for the benefit of rebel insurgencies in Africa—most notably in Sierra Leone, Angola and the Democratic Republic of Congo—to enter the US. According to the campaign such an initiative by the US, which imports 65% of the world's diamond jewelry, could help push the international process forward and encourage prompt adoption of the Kimberly Standards by all countries.

The campaign was launched on St. Valentine's Day, when people in the US give gifts to loved ones. Since some purchase expensive gifts such as diamonds, the NGOs called on the jewelry and diamond industry in the country to support the Clean Diamonds Act. The legislation is sponsored by Congressional representatives Tony Hall and Cynthia McKinney, both Democrats, and Republican Frank Wolf.