

Chapter 4

Non-Governmental Organisations

Maja Kirilova Eriksson

Contents

1	Introduction.	1
2	NGOs and the UN system	1
3	NGOs in the human rights field	3
4	NGO networks	10



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Maja Kirilova Eriksson (Jur. Dr.) is a professor in public international law at the Faculty of Law, Uppsala University, Sweden. She is the author of seven books and a number of articles on various aspects of the protection of international human rights. She teaches public international law and is the director of specialised courses in human rights, humanitarian law and refugee law, as well as human rights and democracy in a European context. Professor Eriksson is a member of the board of the Swedish Red Cross (Vice President) and a number of other NGOs. She was the Swedish member of the EU Network of Independent Experts in Fundamental Rights (2002–2006).

“NGOs act as both a stimulus and a sounding board for international cooperation, denouncing its shortcomings, encouraging its further progress and disseminating its results.”

Catherine Lalumière

1. Introduction

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have played an important role in the overall development of the human rights movement since the early 1800s. It was then focused on the abolition of slavery and humanitarian assistance in armed conflicts. Some organisations deserve special attention, such as the Anti-Slavery Society, which lobbied actively for the abolition of slavery at the Vienna Congress in 1815, and the International Committee of the Red Cross founded in 1859 by Henri Dunant, a Swiss national who had been profoundly affected by his experience at the battle of Solferino the same year. The last three decades have witnessed a dramatic increase in the number of human rights NGOs. They are involved in many more issues than previously, and their political influence has grown both at the international and domestic level.

Whereas originally, NGOs were seen as organisations of idealistic and unprofessional volunteers, their painstaking work, persistence, commitment and increased professionalism have earned them recognition as valuable contributors to society in general and human rights work in particular. Governments in transition have put to good use the skills and expertise developed by NGOs over the years, as evident in South Africa after the demise of apartheid. In the human rights work of the UN, NGOs have moved from a limited formal role to a much more proactive role with regard to both Charter-based institutions and mechanisms as well as the work of the treaty-based procedures (see Chapter 2), where NGO involvement in the process of drafting and adopting the Convention on the Rights of the Child set a new standard.

The legitimacy of NGOs in international human rights law and practice has in other words been enhanced. The need to give people’s voice a chance to be heard and the task of influencing governments and their representatives are issues that have gained importance. The NGO community as part of the non-governmental sector fulfils such a task, especially in international human rights work.

2. NGOs and the UN system

Many NGOs have formal affiliation with intergovernmental organisations (IGOs), such as the United Nations (UN). These organisations may agree to grant NGOs a consultative or observer status, for example the observer status granted by the UN General Assembly to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in 1990¹ and to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in 1994². Yet there are numerous NGOs without such formal relationships, in particular at local level, whose work is of importance to the international community’s efforts to promote and protect human rights. The UN has since its inception sought to define its relationship with NGOs. Article 71 of the Charter provides that the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) “may make suitable arrangements for consultations with non-governmental organisations, which are concerned with matters within its competence”. An important purpose of this system

is to enable organisations representing important elements of public opinion in a large number of countries to express their views as well as to “secure expert information or advice from organisations having special competence in the subjects for which consultative arrangements are made” (§ 20 ECOSOC Res. 1996/31 of 25 July 1996). As early as 1946 ECOSOC established a Committee on Non-Governmental Organisations (CONGO) entrusted with the examination of NGO applications for consultative status.

The conditions and procedures for obtaining consultative status are elaborated in ECOSOC Resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996. Accordingly:

- an NGO shall be concerned with matters falling within the competence of ECOSOC and its subsidiary bodies (§ 1);
- the organisation shall be of representative character and of recognised international standing (§ 9);
- the aims and purposes of the organisation shall be in conformity with the spirit, purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations (§ 2);
- it must undertake to support the work of the UN and to promote knowledge of its principles and activities (§ 3).

In establishing consultative relations with NGOs and in order to organise the consultation with the accredited NGOs, the above mentioned resolution (Part III) distinguishes among NGOs in three different categories, entailing different rights:

Category I – general consultative status (§ 22) covers organisations which are concerned with most of the activities of ECOSOC. In consequence, NGOs in this category have the most comprehensive rights with regard to standard-setting and supervisory mechanisms. They may propose through the Secretary-General and the Committee on Non-Governmental Organisations to place items on the provisional agenda of ECOSOC and its subsidiary bodies.

Category II – special consultative status (§ 23) is obtained by NGOs with a special competence and which are concerned with only a few of the fields of activity covered by the Council.

NGOs of categories I and II may have authorised representatives as observers at all public meetings of ECOSOC and its subsidiary bodies.

NGOs with *roster status* (§ 24) may designate representatives at public meetings concerned with matters within their field of competence, i.e., they may make occasional contributions to the work of the Council and its subsidiary bodies or other UN bodies within their competence.

Since 1996, consultative status may be granted to regional, subregional and national NGOs as well as to global ones (§§ 4 and 8 of Res. 1996/31). Prior to that national NGOs did not have any direct access to the UN. This is a positive development, since national NGOs have successfully taken up many issues before international NGOs have been able to focus their attention on them. As of April 2007, 2,719 NGOs had attained consultative status with the UN, and some 400 NGOs were accredited to the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD).

NGOs may participate as observers or with consultative status at meetings of the UN specialised agencies, UN conferences and special sessions of the General Assembly. Of particular importance for debates on various human rights questions within the Human Rights Council (which was established in 2006 as the successor of the Human Rights Commission), the Sub-Commission for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights or the Commission on the Status of Women are the written and oral statements submitted by NGOs concerning the subject under discussion. In addition, NGOs with consultative status may be requested to carry out specific studies or papers for commissions. There are similar arrangements for the regional African and inter-American human rights systems.³

3. NGOs in the human rights field

NGOs perform a great variety of functions depending on the purpose for which they were established. Many human rights NGOs seek to enforce compliance with international human rights standards. NGOs which operate at the local or national level, such as Tutela Archdiocesan Legal Protection in El Salvador or Free Legal Assistance Group in the Philippines, may compel reconsideration of domestic law, policies and programmes which are deemed incompatible with international human rights law. Such NGOs scrutinise their own governments' attitudes towards and actions in regard to the protection of human rights. Other NGOs, such as the Andean Commission of Jurists and the Arab Lawyers Union, work at the regional level. Yet other organisations, such as Amnesty International (AI), Human Rights Watch (HRW) and the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ), have worldwide interests. AI is currently the largest international NGO in the field of human rights with some 2.2 million members, supporters and subscribers in over 151 countries in every region in the world and local groups in over 80 countries. AI works to expose and prevent some of the gravest violations by governments of people's fundamental human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and other international standards.⁴

Human rights NGOs work on a wide range of issues. There are NGOs which cover a whole set of rights or issues, for example civil and political rights, and there are those which focus on specific rights or issues. A few internationally known organisations are mentioned by way of example:

- civil and political rights (e.g. Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch)
- women's rights (e.g. International Alliance of Women, Centre for Women's Global Leadership)
- children's rights (e.g. Save the Children)
- minority rights (e.g. Minority Rights Group)
- labour rights (e.g. World Confederation of Labour)
- health rights (e.g. International Women's Health Coalition)
- right to education (e.g. International Union of Students, International Organisation for the Development of Freedom of Education)
- right to liberty and security (e.g. International Association of Penal Law)
- right to due process and fair trial (e.g. International Law Association, International Commission of Jurists)
- freedom of religion (e.g. World Council of Churches, the Muslim World League)
- freedom of expression (e.g. Article 19, International PEN)

- right to food (e.g. Food First Information and Action Network)
- peace (e.g. World Peace Council)
- environment (e.g. International Institute for Environment and Development)
- humanitarian (e.g. ICRC, League of Red Cross Societies, Médecins sans Frontières)

The above categories are not exhaustive or mutually exclusive (i.e., an NGO may focus on one or several categories of rights). The definition of human rights has also been constantly expanding. For example, a great number of human rights NGOs based in Johannesburg, South Africa adopted a resolution in February 2004 during a conference of African lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons which affirms the principle of non-discrimination in human rights based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

There are several publications listing NGOs. A list of NGOs with consultative status within the UN is contained in the *Yearbook of the UN*. Among other publications enumerating NGOs are the *Yearbook of International Organisations*, *International Non-Governmental Organisations Enjoying Consultative Status with the Council of Europe*, and the Inter-American Institute of Human Rights' (IIDH) *Guía de ONG de Derechos Humanos*. The *Review of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights* published by the African Union contains a list of NGOs holding observer status with the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. Information about human rights NGOs active in the Asian region may be found at the homepage of the Asian Centre for Human Rights (www.achrweb.org).

It should be noted that some criticism has been put forward, and rightly so, as to the fact that the leading international NGOs are based in Europe and Northern America with very few board members from the South, with which most of their work is concerned. Thus, there is a certain geographical imbalance.

Activities

Human rights NGOs apply various strategies in their work towards achieving compliance with international human rights standards. Some NGOs may concentrate on a particular activity, such as standard-setting, promotion or technical assistance, while others may combine several of these activities in their programmes.

Standard-setting

An important aspect of NGO activities is their involvement in the law-making process. Even though NGOs are not included in the formal process of creating international law, they may influence it by initiating discussion on topics within the scope of their interests, proposing and drafting conventions/declarations, lobbying and providing expertise to governments. Several NGOs, among them the International Council of Women, played a considerable role in the drafting of certain articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and their corresponding provisions in the 1966 Covenants on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). On several occasions thereafter NGOs have identified new areas that require norm-setting. They have, for example, contributed to the development of human rights norms concerning the prohibition of torture. Amnesty International's campaign for the abolition of torture has had great impact in this regard. The Swiss Committee against Torture, now the Association for the Prevention of Torture (APT), and the International Commis-

sion of Jurists (ICJ) were the initiators of the European Convention for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. Another issue where NGOs have initiated the law-making process concerns the rights of indigenous peoples. ICRC has played a crucial role in the development of humanitarian law. NGOs have also done much to initiate the drafting of the 1997 Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction. Likewise, the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) which entered into force on 22 December 2000 was an NGO initiative.

The diligent engagement by NGOs in the preparatory work on the UN Convention against Torture and the Convention on the Rights of the Child should also be mentioned. The active participation of several specialised NGOs, such as Defence for Children International, successfully influenced the deliberations of the UN Working Group on the Rights of the Child. Their contribution turned out to be instrumental in the inclusion of a number of important articles in the Convention. Other achievements are the Declaration on Enforced Disappearances, which was adopted by the UN General Assembly in December 1992, and the 2005 Convention on the same subject. The International Commission of Jurists, working in conjunction with other NGOs, took an active part in drafting these instruments. The NGOs' role in encouraging new thinking and/or new interpretation of existing standards in modern international law has been recognised in Article 7 of the 1998 Declaration on Human Rights Defenders. The unprecedented inclusion of sexual and gender crimes within the 1998 Statute of the International Criminal Court is due, in part, to the work of the Women's Caucus for Gender Justice.

Through participation in the pre-conferences and the parallel activities to the main UN thematic conferences NGOs have in later years gained a platform from which to influence the discussions and the outcome of the conferences by the submission of common recommendations. Thus, the final documents from the Rio, Vienna, Cairo, Copenhagen, Beijing and Istanbul conferences contain many of the NGOs' demands. NGOs ensured, e.g., that the issue of violence against women appeared on the agenda of the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna in 1993.

NGOs, moreover, contribute to the introduction of domestic laws and the creation of legal systems for the protection of human rights. As a result of the efforts of several NGOs, including the Association of African Women in Research and Development, female genital mutilation was outlawed in Togo, Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal. This is an important aspect of human rights promotion.

Promotion and protection of human rights

Human rights NGOs fulfil several important tasks in regard to the observation and implementation of existing international law standards. This constitutes the main area of activity for most NGOs. The second World Conference on Human Rights, held in 1993, recognised in the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action (1:3) the important role of NGOs active in the field of human rights and/or development in the protection and promotion of all human rights and fundamental freedoms at national, regional and universal levels.

NGOs have a key role in providing information and opinions. Information has an educative and preventive function. NGOs make an invaluable contribution to the *raising of public awareness* of existing legal norms, which is of crucial importance to prevent violations of human rights and promoting their implementation. Some NGOs are committed to the teaching of existing human rights norms, of the possibilities of redress and the dissemination of information both to the public in general and to vulnerable groups, making the latter aware of their rights and freedoms. Others are committed to the education of practitioners such as judges, lawyers, law enforcement officials and others executing state power, raising awareness of their obligation to abstain from abuse of power and to secure the protection of the rights of others. The International Women's Rights Action Watch Asia-Pacific (IWRAW-AP) and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) conducted, e.g., a training seminar one week prior to the CEDAW session in 1998 for a number of women from national NGOs, educating them about the Women's Convention and state obligations. Furthermore, the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) has established training programmes for women leaders through its projects in developing countries.

There are also NGOs specialising in providing other human rights NGOs with updated and relevant information needed to work within the international human rights system. The International Service for Human Rights (ISHR) situated in Geneva makes *information services* available, including summaries and analyses of all human rights meetings held within the UN system. In 1997 the ISHR and Amnesty International published an excellent sourcebook, *The UN and Refugees' Human Rights: A Manual on How UN Human Rights Mechanisms Can Protect the Rights of Refugees*. The Canada-based Human Rights Internet publishes annually impressive NGO materials. The Helsinki Monitor, a quarterly published jointly by the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights and the Netherlands Helsinki Committee, includes a complete overview of the most important developments within the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and reviews recent publications on the Helsinki process and current human rights issues. As of 2007 over 1,500 NGOs which have information components in their programmes are associated with the UN Department of Public Information (DPI).

Most NGOs provide *independent monitoring*, i.e., the search for and gathering of information on the human rights situation. NGOs receive complaints from individuals and groups. They further collect information by reviewing relevant domestic laws, court decisions etc., and gather press releases, newspaper clippings and reports by other NGOs. This allows them to form a coherent picture of the human rights situation in a given country and/or region. However, NGOs, specifically international ones, still largely focus on civil and political rights. Considering the interdependence of all rights, efforts should be made towards working on economic and social rights as well as collecting and disseminating information on these issues.

Both international and national NGOs are involved in fact-finding missions in areas where human rights violations are alleged to be occurring. National and local NGOs are generally best placed to visit sites of alleged abuse and seek verification of the complaints. The Inter-American Commission relied to a great extent on the assistance of national and local NGOs to arrange interviews with victims, witnesses of human rights abuses, representative labour leaders, political dissidents etc. during its on-site investigations in Chile

and Argentina. Other sources of information frequently referred to are church officials, relatives of prisoners, refugees, opposition groups, concerned public officials, lawyers, journalists and others.

A clear advantage is that the majority of NGOs collect information and evidence continuously and over a long period of time, whereas the mandates of intergovernmental organisations' fact-finding missions often are of limited duration. Much of the information concerning human rights violations essential to experts and special rapporteurs (thematic and country-oriented) within the UN as well as other intergovernmental organisations comes from NGOs. For instance, several NGOs, among them Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, have brought refugee issues to the attention of the Special Rapporteur on Torture, the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention and the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women. Reports and various documents disseminated by NGOs are important sources of information for the UN treaty bodies when evaluating reports submitted by the States Parties on the implementation of the various human rights conventions. One could even claim that most of the monitoring bodies are dependent upon first-hand information collected and furnished by NGOs, which often turns out to be the only readily accessible data. The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention confirmed in 1995 that 75 percent of the cases considered were reported by international NGOs and another 23 percent were brought to its attention by national NGOs. NGOs such as Amnesty International and the International Federation for Human Rights submit most of the cases reviewed under the confidential UN 1503 procedure (see Chapter 2).

The Convention on the Rights of the Child is the only human rights treaty which specifically authorises NGO cooperation with the treaty committee (Article 45). The Committee on the Rights of the Child may invite any NGO it wishes to participate in its work. It is the only human rights treaty body that has a full-time NGO Coordination Group, funded i.a. by Swedish SIDA. However, the other monitoring bodies have developed extensive relations with the NGO community on an informal basis. At the 18th session of the African Commission the representative of the Ligue Tunisienne de Défense des Droits de l'Homme provided pertinent up-to-date information on the human rights situation in Tunisia, which was used by a few members of the Commission to question the representative of the Tunisian Government.

Information provided by NGOs enables the intergovernmental monitoring bodies to have *meaningful dialogue* with representatives of governments about the true human rights situation in their countries. NGO participation in the reporting process has become a significant factor in inducing states to comply with their obligations under the conventions in question.

The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has introduced provisions for NGO briefings to the whole Committee on thematic issues and it has made use of the NGO input in its questioning during the examination of state reports. The Human Rights Committee's Concluding Observations of 1999 on Canada's report under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) demonstrate that the Committee has taken into consideration the information provided by several NGOs such as the Charter Committee on Poverty (CCPI). In this regard the Compilation of the HRC's Concluding Observations for Latin American Countries which was recently published by

the OHCHR and the Centro de Derechos Humanos of the Universidad de Santiago de Chile should be mentioned. Furthermore, the International Women's Action Watch has on several occasions provided CEDAW with alternative reports containing information that corrects or adds to the States Parties' official reports. At the extraordinary session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights to consider the human rights situation in Nigeria, which was held in December 1995 in Kampala, Nigerian NGOs provided the meeting with up-to-date, accurate information on continuing violations of human rights, contradicting the assertions by the representatives of the Nigerian Government that the human rights situation was improving. One can maintain that it was the efforts of the NGOs that persuaded the African Commission to adopt concrete measures to address the situation in Nigeria.

A major development in the international human rights community in the last two decades has been greater focus on *preventive work*. Identification of critical issues and early-warning indicators are crucial for conflict prevention. NGOs may draw attention to situations within a country that threaten the security of its people. Thus, as early as March 1993, an International Commission of Inquiry comprising representatives of four respected NGOs issued a report suggesting that the then horrific human rights abuses against the Tutsis in Rwanda might qualify as genocide. In October 1993 the Security Council established the UN Assistance Mission for Rwanda. However, the international community failed to prevent the disaster of 1994. NGOs have a valuable role to play in conflict prevention based on their knowledge and experience of operating within regions of conflict. The Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, Amnesty International and the Jacob Blaustein Institute for Human Rights, i.a., have been very successful in their efforts to make human rights an integral part of conflict prevention. International Alert continues to develop and strengthen links with and among several NGOs in order to support practical projects in an area of actual or potential conflict.

Publicity has great impact on the implementation of human rights law. Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and other NGOs produce annual reports on countries or themes, which give invaluable information about human rights violations. Human Rights Watch, for example, conducts regular, systematic investigations of human rights abuses in some seventy countries around the world.

Punishment of past human rights abuses has not been a high priority issue in the international community. This is reflected in the fact that only a few NGOs are involved in activities aimed at securing *prosecution of perpetrators* of human rights violations and grave breaches of humanitarian law. There is a lot to be done by NGOs in order to contravene the culture of impunity. There are, however, some encouraging examples in this area. The Humanitarian Law Center initiated at its foundation a database on massive humanitarian law violations on the territory of the former Yugoslavia. A part of its research has been published in Spotlight Reports since 1993. The Humanitarian Law Centre cooperates with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia and has made available to it a large part of its documentation on humanitarian law violations in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia. In this regard we may also mention the impressive work carried out by Helsinki Watch during its missions to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Slovenia and Yugoslavia, resulting in a two-volume report on war crimes containing invaluable material. Resulting from materials gathered by Human Rights Watch and seven other

NGOs, legal action against the Chadian dictator Hissène Habré was initiated in February 2000 by a prosecutor in Senegal.

NGOs are playing an increasingly important role in *international litigation*. NGOs may in other words initiate and join as *amici curiae* in litigation. NGOs may participate in the proceedings of the European Court of Justice, the European Court of Human Rights and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. The written comments by the Center for Reproductive Rights in the *Tysiac v. Poland* case which was decided by the ECHR in March 2007 played an important role in the review of the case. According to the 1998 Additional Protocol to the European Social Charter, 43 NGOs are entitled to submit complaints to the European Committee of Social Rights. The ICJ lodged the first complaint in 1999 and by May 2007 42 complaints had been submitted by various NGOs, among them the World Organisation against Torture, European Roma Rights Center and the International Federation of Human Rights Leagues.

Reliable sources represent a difficult problem for all human rights investigations. How can the accuracy of information supplied to a field worker by NGOs be verified? Corroboration and cross-checking of different sources of information is important in order to assure reliability and to establish their authenticity. NGOs should be able to disclose information regarding the fact-finding methodology employed during investigation of a specific human rights problem and they should be able to show that their factual statements are correct. On the other hand, one should also be aware that there are circumstances where access to first-hand information is very limited. To require full identification of sources of information would discourage communications from repressed groups and might expose witnesses to a risk of retaliation. The record that an NGO has compiled over time may indicate whether it deserves credence.

Assistance

Advisory services and technical assistance have expanded in recent years. They constitute an aspect of NGOs' preventive work. In addition, many organisations offer counseling and aid to human rights victims and their families. Diakonia, a Swedish NGO, gives aid to family members of the 'disappeared' and extrajudicially executed persons in several countries. Many NGOs provide legal aid to victims, for instance by helping them prepare applications and submissions as well as occasionally representing them in proceedings. NGOs may also be heard as witnesses and/or experts.

The World Council of Churches, the League of Red Cross Societies, Caritas and a great number of other organisations provide humanitarian assistance, including medical aid. Even members of the Security Council have met to discuss humanitarian issues and assistance in, for example, the Great Lakes region with such NGOs as Médecins sans Frontières and Oxfam.

Rehabilitation of victims of torture is yet another important aspect of NGO assistance.

4. NGO networks

NGOs work in different ways. Some use a limited number of techniques, others employ a wide range of methods. Whereas some focus on the mobilisation of public opinion, others will proceed by quiet diplomacy or by lobbying decision-makers and other forms of advocacy. The Minority Rights Group and Survival International, e.g., have been effective in lobbying on behalf of minority groups and aboriginal peoples respectively.

Cooperation between national and international NGOs can lead to greater compliance by governments with their obligations under international human rights and humanitarian law. Some operate individually, others participate in networking, sharing information and tasks. In situations where national NGOs face difficulties in fact-finding and exposing human rights violations, affiliation with a regional/global NGOs may turn out to be essential. The International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights, an NGO that seeks to promote compliance by the participating States of the OSCE with human rights provisions of the Helsinki Final Act and its Follow-up Documents, has affiliated Helsinki groups/committees from various countries in the former Soviet bloc. Networking enhances the impact of NGOs; for instance, the presentation of joint statements in international fora carries a lot more weight than if a statement was presented by only one NGO. Networks usually focus on specific themes, such as environment and human rights, and operate especially around specific objectives and campaigns. Extensive and impressive networks, mostly as coalitions, have been established across countries, regions and continents in the preparation for and during the thematic UN conferences held in 1992 in Rio, 1993 in Vienna, 1994 in Cairo, 1995 in Copenhagen, 1995 in Beijing, 1996 in Istanbul and the World Social Forum in 2006. Even though mostly temporary this new form of cooperation between NGOs seems to be gaining ground, and there is less focus on vertical organisational links. A worldwide network of NGOs was established during the Vienna Conference when the practice of permitting only NGOs with consultative status with ECOSOC to take part in UN conferences was broken. For the first time many local and regional organisations were given full participatory status after their active involvement in the regional preparatory conferences, which were held in Tunis, in San José and in Bangkok. In this way Vienna marked the confirmation of a broad, grassroots human rights movement. Networking is especially important, because it can give support to national NGOs active in countries whose governments have poor human rights records, are sensitive to criticism and create obstacles to the proper functioning of NGOs.

The NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child (a continuation and reorganisation of the informal *ad hoc* NGO Group on the Drafting of the Convention on the Rights of the Child) has from its inception aimed at encouraging the development of national children's rights networks, i.e., networks of interested citizens which aim to achieve the observance of the rights recognised in the Convention.

In this regard also, the existing framework of the Conference of NGOs in consultative status within the UN (CONGO) is very significant. Several special committees, e.g., on human rights and disarmament, organise official meetings in order to formulate NGO proposals for various activities at the UN. The most recent initiative is the Conference of NGOs in consultative relationship with the UN and partners which took place in June 2007 bringing together actors of global civil society to discuss future strategies. Another

example is the African Civil Society Forum which was organised by among others the African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET) together with the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and the AU in March 2007 in Addis Ababa, bringing together representatives of national, regional and international NGOs from the whole of Africa with the aim to raise the NGOs' awareness of issues on the UN agenda and to explore ways of cooperation to impact on African institutions.

The NGO community is an essential source of inspiration and a channel for the UN and other actors in the international arena to acquire skills, knowledge, new ideas and concepts, and should be used more as a resource. Globalisation has led to the rise in power of non-state economic actors. The Swedish section of AI has, e.g., established a working group on the formation of a new relationship and partnership with global economic actors. This corresponds to some of the proposals contained in the Declaration and Agenda for Action adopted by 1,350 representatives of over 1,000 NGOs and other civil society organisations from more than 100 countries at the Millennium Forum, which took place in May 2000 in New York.

Notes

¹ General Assembly Resolution 45/6 of 16 October 1990.

² General Assembly Resolution 49/2 of 19 October 1994.

³ It should also be mentioned that several special procedures of the Human Rights Council and the Sub-Commission allow for direct access of NGOs without consultative status. ECOSOC Resolution 1996/31 (Part VIII) also indicates the circumstances under which consultative status may be suspended or withdrawn.

⁴ The focus of AI's campaigns is to free all prisoners of conscience; ensure fair and prompt trials for political prisoners; abolish the death penalty, torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment of prisoners or other detained persons; and end extrajudicial executions and 'disappearances'. The mandate of the organisation has been broadened during the 1990s to include the protection of civilians during armed conflicts ensured by the 1949 Geneva Conventions.

The Norwegian Centre for Human Rights aims to contribute to the realisation of internationally recognised human rights, through research and reporting, teaching, advisory services, information and documentation. The Centre was founded in 1987 and is organised as an interdisciplinary centre under the Faculty of Law at the University of Oslo. Since 2001 the Centre has been designated as the National Institution for Human Rights in Norway.

The Norwegian Resource Bank for Democracy and Human Rights – NORDEM – was established at the Norwegian Centre for Human Rights in 1993 with the support of the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. NORDEM aims to accommodate international requests for personnel assistance in subject areas relevant to the promotion of human rights. Requests for personnel to human rights field operations are serviced through the NORDEM Stand-by Force, which is operated jointly with the Norwegian Refugee Council.

The first edition of the Manual on Human Rights Monitoring was developed at the request of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and published in 1997. The Manual is integral to the generic training provided to members of the NORDEM Stand-by Force in order to prepare them for human rights field operations. This is the third, revised edition (2008). The new edition includes one new chapter (Chapter 10) and three rewritten chapters (Chapters 2, 5 and 11). The remaining chapters are updated according to events and new developments in the field of human rights since the second edition in 2001.

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