

**HIGH LEVEL CONSULTATION AND CAPACITY BUILDING MEETING
TO LAUNCH THE UN-NGO INFORMAL REGIONAL NETWORK
UN-NGO-IRENE IN TUNISIA**

Tunis, Tunisia, 10 August 2004

Background

To increase civil society's involvement in economic and social life and the number of Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) being granted consultative status, the United Nations Economic and Social Council decided to promote inclusive relationships with a large number of NGOs from all regions of the world. This initiative also responds to the fact that **a great number of organizations face financial and logistical constraints that minimize considerably the effective use of their consultative status with ECOSOC and limit their participation in the international decision making process**, preventing them from taking advantage of the increasing role they might play in the new governance at all levels (global, regional, national and local).

In 1999, the General Assembly recommended that the United Nations Secretariat NGO Section (Department of Economic and Social Affairs) "improve the exchange of information through informal networks of country or regionally-based NGOs in consultative status with the ECOSOC, which will serve as links between the NGO Section and NGOs in each region". This recommendation intends to promote regular contacts between this Section and NGOs, to improve the spread of information on the United Nations' activities regionally and internationally towards NGOs and to strengthen their capacities and their partnership with the United Nations.

In order to respond to these objectives, the NGO Section/DESA promoted the establishment of an informal national network of NGOs.

The Network, supported through the intermediary activities of designated national coordinator organizations, aims at creating a system that provides information and support to all organizations, even the smallest and the most isolated, and gives them the opportunity for sharing expertise and resources, so as to reinforce their impact. It thus contributes to harmonizing and unifying the actions launched by the United Nations System in favor of an increased cooperation and partnership with civil society.

In January 2002, the meeting on “Capacity Building for the UN-NGO Informal Regional Network in Africa”, held in Hammamet (Tunisia), established the UN-NGO-IRENE in Africa. One of the most relevant outcomes of the meeting was the designation of five African NGOs to serve as sub-regional coordinators and of one of them as regional coordinator.

In May 2003, the UN-NGO-IRENE in Eastern Europe was also established with the support of UNDP/Romania and the Government of Romania during the Bucharest, Romania Meeting with two sub-regional coordinators and one regional coordinator.

In the framework of the worldwide development of the UN-NGO-IRENE and of its implementation in the remaining regions and countries, the ATM (Tunisian Mother’s Association), a leading NGO in consultative status with ECOSOC, hosted on 10 August 2004, in Tunis, Tunisia the High Level Consultation and Capacity Building Meeting to launch the UN-NGO-IRENE in Tunisia, with the support of the UN-NGO-IRENE / NGO Section / ECOSOC of UN DESA.

Additionally, the interest sparked by the concept of UN-NGO-IRENE itself has attracted a number of UN and other intergovernmental and large international bodies to seek synergy and mutually supportive action for the UN-NGO-IRENE/NGO Section/DESA, as informal partners in its implementation.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The High Level consultation and Capacity Building Meeting to launch the UN-NGO Informal Regional Network in Tunisia (UN-NGO-IRENE/Tunisia) took place in Tunis, Tunisia on 10 August 2004.

Hosted by ATM (Tunisian Mother's Association), the Tunisian leading NGO in general consultative status with ECOSOC, the Meeting was organized in partnership with the UN-NGO-IRENE/NGO Section, Office for Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Support and Coordination of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), and the support of the Government of Tunisia. In welcoming the participants, the President of ATM, Ms. Saida Agrebi highlighted the importance of the Capacity Building Meeting to launch the UN-NGO Informal national Network in Tunisia with the support of ATM taking into account its active role as regional coordinator of UN-NGO-IRENE/ Africa.

On behalf of the United Nations, The UNDESA Representative, Ms Hanifa Mezoui Chief of the NGO Section underlined the importance of partnership between government, civil society and the United Nations in achieving the Millennium Declaration and all the MDGs. She reminded the background of the UN-NGO-IRENE focusing on the priority given by the NGO Section/ECOSOC of UNDESA to capacity building programme for NGOs of developing countries as recommended by the ECOSOC Resolution of 1996 and the General Assembly of 1999. Ms Mezoui also emphasized the role played by ATM, the hosting NGO and its outstanding efforts in organizing the Meeting so rapidly and efficiently. She finally thanked the Government of Tunisia for its full support to the Meeting and the NGOs for their attendance.

The Minister of Women and Family on behalf of the Government of Tunisia, expressed her great appreciation and thanks for this important initiative and stressed the full support of the Government of Tunisia to NGOs in order to play a significant role at national level in order to strengthen good governance.

Ms Saida Agrebi, President of ATM explained the evolution of the NGO sector in Tunisia focusing on NGOs' role in strengthening regional cooperation. In presenting ATM objectives and relevant activities, she called upon all NGOs for a strengthened teamwork to enhance their contribution to the implementation of the MDGs in Tunisia.

The Meeting was conducted by Ms Mezoui who made a power point presentation on UN-NGO-IRENE role in strengthening NGO Capacity and reinforcing networking among NGOs worldwide and especially those in consultative status with ECOSOC in order to promote partnership initiatives and projects to reach the MDGs.

Several NGO participants generously shared their innovative experiences with the participants making concrete recommendations on how to duplicate and adapt such projects in their respective field of intervention.

A large debate followed the presentation on UN –NGO-IRENE and the NGO innovative experiences showing a strong NGO interest in the Network taking into account its potentials.

At the closing session of the Meeting, the President of ATM warmly thanked the participants and expressed her deep appreciation for the outstanding work performed by Ms Mezoui to have a successful Meeting.

Participants representing NGOs with ECOSOC status attended the Meeting as follows:

- ATM-OMMA (Maghreb Mothers Organization)
- Tunisie 21 (Association Femme Tunisie 21)
- ATIM (Association de l'Internet et Multimédia)
- ATDF (Association Tunisienne des Droits de l'Enfant)
- UNFT (Union Nationale des Femmes de Tunisie)
- OTEE (Organisation Tunisienne de l'Education et de la Famille)
- ATDD (Association Tunisie Développement Durable)

The meeting agreed on the relevance and the need for an Informal National Network of NGOs in Tunisia. NGO representatives noticed that such an initiative was a timely one and need to be extended to other countries of the region

It was agreed that the primary focus for the Network should be on the NGOs in consultative status with ECOSOC, but that it needed to go beyond this to include all NGOs supporting the goals of the United Nations, notably as set out in the Millennium Declaration and the MDGs.

Building on the work of existing NGO coalitions, participants underlined the need for the Network to be quickly operational to facilitate the access of the Tunisian NGOs to the global scene.

Consideration was given to the need for a database of Tunisian NGOs to strengthen networking and exchange of information, innovative experiences and best practices among the NGO community. The scope of the Network and responsibilities of participating NGOs were discussed and agreed upon. ATM as the national coordinator of the Tunisian Network was asked to take responsibility for this in collaboration with the thematic focal points to coordinate the UN-NGO-IRENE/Africa and the support of Ms. Najet Karaborni, Senior Interregional Adviser of UNDESA and UN-NGO-IRENE/NGO Section Project Coordinator.

Participating NGOs stressed the vital importance of mobilizing additional resources in order to realize the Network's potential. Information about sources of funding could be disseminated through the Network.

Following substantial and fruitful discussions, the meeting agreed on the following major issues:

I. OBJECTIVES

The following objectives were agreed:

1. To strengthen and promote partnerships initiatives and projects among and between the Tunisian NGOs, the UN-NGO-IRENE/ Africa, the United Nations, Government, Corporate Sector and Donor Community;
2. The network should serve as a focal point and clearing house among the Tunisian ECOSOC accredited NGOs and should help other leading and committed NGOs to apply for consultative status with ECOSOC;
3. To establish permanent dialogue and direct contacts between NGOs, the UN-NGO-IRENE/NGO Section/DESA and the United Nations in general.

II. STRUCTURE

It was agreed that the structure of the Network would be flexible and open, and optimize the use of Information and Communication technology (ICT). Much of the actual networking would be conducted through the Internet. It was considered necessary to set up a Web portal for the Network and facilitate information sharing activities.

To better serve the needs of the beneficiaries of the Network and contribute to an effective and concrete implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the outcomes of the major UN conferences, it was agreed to create the eight following thematic focal points.

Thematic Focal Points

1. **Poverty Reduction (MDG 1)**
 - ATM (Association Tunisienne des Meres)
2. **Education (MDG2):**
 - Organisation Tunisienne de l'Education et de la Famille
3. **Gender Equality & Women Empowerment (MDG 3):**
 - Association Feminine Tunisie 21
 - Association Femme et Developpment
4. **Health (MDGs 4, 5 and 6):**
 - Association Tunisienne de Lutte contre les MST/SIDA
5. **Environment, Habitat and Sustainable Development (MDG 7):**
 - Association Tunisienne pour la Protection de la Nature et de l'environnement

6. Child

- Association Tunisienne pour la Protection de l'enfant

7. Disability:

- BESMA
- Association d'Assistance aux Grands Handicapés a Domicile (AAGHD)

8. ICT and partnership

- ATIM (Association de l'Internet et Multimédia)
- ATUCOM (Association Tunisienne de Communication)

III. STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN

The meeting concluded with the need of establishing in the near future a Strategic Action Plan with the support of Ms Najet Karaborni, the Senior Interregional Adviser of UNDESA and the Director of the UN-NGO-IRENE/NGO Section Project. This plan should include the preparatory work for the Annual Conference of the UN-NGO-IRENE/Tunisia and other main networking activities as well as activities and projects related to each thematic focal point to cover all relevant Millennium Declaration and MDGs for Tunisia. Other relevant activities for Tunisian NGOs will be discussed and included in the Network Strategic Action Plan during upcoming sessions of respective focal points with interested NGOs and the UN-NGO-IRENE Annual Conference.

IV. ENLIGHTENMENT IN THE PRESS

Press information and invitation about the Capacity Building Meeting to Launch the UN-NGO-IRENE in the Tunisia was sent to several mass-media and news agency representatives.

Several media representatives attended the launching meeting. The event was enlightened on TV Channels and reported in the newspapers.

Press information about the results of the meeting was sent again to all mass-media and news agency representatives. Several articles were published at the newspapers.

V. VISIT TO NGO PROJECT

The UNDESA Representative visited on 10 August 2004 the ATM Headquarters. Ms Mezoui appreciated the visit, exchanged her views in this field and expressed her wish to develop such projects in other countries and especially in Africa with the help of ATM and the coordination of the newly established UN-NGO-IRENE.

She considered the progress of ATM projects such as micro-credits for needy mothers; the pedagogic, cultural, sport and digital center for handicapped children; the creativity art and handicraft workshop; and the process of multidiscipline caravans to serve to the grass root population and implement the MDGs.