

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

Port-au-Prince, Haiti, 5 September 2005

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 regional network of NGOs (UN- NGO-IRENE) gathering organizations representing Northern Africa, Western Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Eastern Europe and Latin America. This initiative was launched in April 2002 during the meeting of Aracaju (Brazil) "Launch of the UN-NGO Informal Regional Network".

The Network, supported through the intermediary activities of designated regional and sub-regional 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 November 2004, The UN-NGO-IRENE in the Caspian (Caucasian/Central Asia) Region was established during the Baku, Azerbaijan Meeting with the support of the United Nations System in Azerbaijan and the Government of Azerbaijan. A regional Coordinator from Azerbaijan was elected.

In March 2005, the UN- NGO-IRENE in Asia and the Pacific was established in Islamabad, Pakistan and the UN-NGO-IRENE/China was elected to act as the first Regional Coordinator of the Network.

The UN-NGO-IRENE was also established at national level in Azerbaijan, Canada, China, India, Pakistan and Mauritania. For Mauritania, it was created with the strong support of UNDP/Mauritania and the Government.

In the framework of the worldwide development of the UN-NGO-IRENE and of its implementation in the remaining regions and countries, the Foundation for Habitat and Homeless “FONDHABISA”, a leading NGO in consultative status with ECOSOC, hosted on 5 September 2005, in Haiti, Port-au-Prince the High Level Consultation and Capacity Building Meeting to launch the UN-NGO-IRENE in the Caribbean and in Haiti, 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 The Caribbean region (UN-NGO-IRENE/ Caribbean) took place in the Hotel Montana, Petion-ville, Haiti on 5 September 2005.

Hosted by FONDHABISA, a leading NGO in 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 Haiti. In welcoming the participants, the President of FONDHABISA, Mr. Frantz-Gerard S. Verret highlighted the importance of the Capacity Building Meeting to launch the UN-NGO Informal Regional Network not only in Haiti (UN-NGO-IRENE/Haiti) but also in the Caribbean Region (UN-NGO-IRENE/Caribbean). In bringing together the Haitian Civil Society and the Caribbean one, the Meeting aimed to enhance the exchange of experiences among NGOs, promote partnership initiatives and projects, and strengthen the NGO role at all levels (local, national, regional and global).

On behalf of the United Nations, The UNDESA Representative, Ms Najet Karaborni underlined the importance of result-oriented and efficient 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 programmes for NGOs of developing countries and Small Islands States as recommended by the ECOSOC Resolution of 1996 and the General Assembly of 1999. As the Caribbean has a very reduced number of NGOs in consultative status, the High Level Consultation and Capacity Building Meeting to launch the UN-NGO-IRENE in the Caribbean is extremely important. It aims firstly at increasing the number of NGOs in the Caribbean with status, secondly at reinforcing the NGO capacity, and thirdly at promoting joint partnership initiatives and programmes between the civil society, the government, the private sector, the international community and the United Nations. Ms Karaborni also emphasized the role played by FONDHABISA, the hosting NGO and its outstanding efforts in organizing the Meeting so rapidly and efficiently. She finally thanked the Government of Haiti for its full support to the Meeting and the international and regional NGOs for their attendance.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs and External Cooperation, Mr. Herald Abraham expressed, on behalf of the Government of Haiti, his great appreciation and thanks for this important initiative and stressed the full support of the Government of Haiti to NGOs in order to play a significant role not only at national level but also at regional and international ones in order to strengthen good governance.

Mr. Greard Bretoux , Secretary General of FONDHABISA explained the evolution of the NGO sector focusing on NGOs' role in strengthening regional cooperation. In presenting FONDHABISA objectives and relevant activities, he called upon all NGOs for

a strengthened teamwork to enhance their contribution to the implementation of the MDGs in the Caribbean as well.

The Meeting was conducted by Ms Najet Karaborni who made a power point presentation on ECOSOC and its relationship with NGOs focusing on the role and objectives of the UN-NGO-IRENE in building NGO Capacity and strengthening networking among NGOs from the South and the North to promote partnership initiatives and projects to reach the MDGs within Participatory Governance at all levels and for all people in the world.

Several participant NGOs and experts generously shared their innovative experiences with the participants making concrete recommendations on how to duplicate and adapt such projects in the Caribbean.

A large debate followed the presentation on UN –NGO-IRENE and the NGO innovative experiences showing a strong NGO interest in the Network and in the implementation of the experiences presented in the Caribbean region.

At the closing session of the Meeting, the President of FONDHABISA warmly thanked the participants and expressed his deep appreciation for the tremendous and outstanding work performed by Ms Karaborni to have a successful and result-oriented Meeting and get more than expected outcomes. He also thanked Ms Hanifa Mezoui, Chief of the NGO Section for her support to the UN-NGO-IRENE development.

76 Participants attended the Meeting as follows:

- ◆ **40 representing NGOs from the Caribbean region and Central America (Barbados, Costa Rica, Dominica & St Vincent, Haiti, and Mexico)**
- ◆ **6 representing international NGOs**
- ◆ **3 representing the Government of Haiti**
- ◆ **25 students in foreign affairs**
- ◆ **1 international expert**
- ◆ **1 representative of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA)**

The meeting agreed on the relevance and the need for an Informal Regional Network of NGOs in the Caribbean region. 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 Caribbean region NGOs to the global scene. One of the important added values of this Network would also be its

responsiveness to the diversity of the Caribbean region and the priority given to engaging with NGOs at all levels (local, regional, national and global).

Consideration was given to the need for a database of Caribbean 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. FONDHABISA as the regional coordinator of the Caribbean Network was asked to take responsibility for this in collaboration with the thematic focal points of the UN-NGO-IRENE/Caribbean 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 working groups and 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 Caribbean region NGOs, the United Nations, Government, Corporate Sector and Donor Community;
2. The network should serve as a focal point and clearing house among the Caribbean region 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 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, 7 thematic working groups were formed to come up with 7 NGO thematic focal points and a comprehensive strategic action plan

based on the specific needs of each sector/theme. Following the working groups presentations, it was agreed to establish the 7 following NGO thematic focal points:

Thematic Focal Points at regional level

1. **Poverty and Extreme Poverty Reduction and Hunger (MDG 1):**
 - ◆ to be selected among interested leading NGOs from other Caribbean countries by the UN-NGO-IRENE/NGO Section in cooperation with the regional coordinator of the Network
2. **Education (MDG 2):**
 - ◆ **Christian Children's Fund – Caribbean (Dominica & St Vincent)**
3. **Gender Equality & Women Empowerment (MDG 3):**
 - ◆ to be selected among interested leading NGOs from other Caribbean countries by the UN-NGO-IRENE/NGO Section in cooperation with the regional coordinator of the Network
4. **Health (MDGs 4, 5 and 6)**
 - ◆ **FRDP (Fire Rescue Development Program)**
5. **Environment, Habitat and Sustainable Development (MDG 7)** :
 - ◆ **SODEPA (Natural Park Exploitation Society): Haiti**
6. **Disability**
 - ◆ **Christian blind Mission (Mexico and the Caribbean)**
7. **Peace, Security, Conflict Prevention, Human Rights, Governance and partnership (Millennium Declaration)**
 - ◆ **Caribbean Policy Development Centre (Barbados)**

III. STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN

The meeting concluded with a discussion and adoption of a Strategic Action Plan, which includes the preparatory work for the Annual Conference of the UN-NGO-IRENE/Caribbean region 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 the region.

Other crucial activities will be discussed and included in the Network Strategic Action Plan during upcoming sessions of respective focal points with relevant 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 Caribbean was sent to several mass-media and news agency representatives.

Several media representatives attended at the 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 (attached)

V. VISIT TO NGO PROJECT

The UNDESA Representative visited on 6 September 2005 the FONDHABISA Headquarters in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. After the presentation on the project activities made by the project managers, a friendly discussion followed particularly on the participation and involvement of the beneficiaries as well as on the projects' impact on the target groups and the collaboration of the local authorities and other NGOs. Ms Karaborni appreciated the visit, exchanged her views and extensive experience in this field and expressed her wish to develop such projects in other countries of the Caribbean region with the help of FONDHABISA and the coordination of the newly established UN-NGO-IRENE.