

**FORUM TO LAUNCH  
THE UN-NGO INFORMAL REGIONAL NETWORK IN CANADA**

**Kelowna, British Columbia, Canada  
18 – 20 February 2004**

**Background**

In April 2001, a meeting in Aracaju, Brazil, formally launched the UN Informal Regional Network of NGOs (UN-NGO-IRENE). This initiative, spearheaded by the NGO Section of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs was designed to address a problem of growing concern in this age of global development based on easy access to and exchange of information and communication as well as a better use of new technologies' potential for the NGO sector development.

As a result of the Economic and Social Council's emphasis on the importance of a representative and inclusive NGO relationship, consultative status is being granted to a steadily increasing number of organizations from countries and regions that provide geographical diversity, but are often economically distressed. A significant number of organizations, therefore, find themselves subject to financial and logistical constraints that effectively limit their ability to make full use of their consultative status with ECOSOC, particularly in regard to participation in the international arena.

One underlying problem has always been the difficulty of establishing and maintaining regular contact between the NGO Section in New York and the large number of NGOs with limited communication systems. These organizations are therefore deprived of up to date information on UN activities in the economic and social fields and the electronic systems of communication that has become a trademark of the increasingly influential NGO sector.

To address this problem, the UN Informal NGO Regional Network was designed as a means of drawing even the smallest, most isolated organizations into a system that provides information and support and the opportunity for sharing expertise and resources of every description to support joint NGO activities within and among regions thereby enhancing their significance and strengthening their impact. One of the most important aims of the proposed network is the possibility of providing national and regional organizations with the practical tools to make a tangible contribution to the work of ECOSOC both operationally and by adding a broad-based NGO perspective to the deliberations of that body, particularly the discussions of the High Level Segment. It is intended that the networking capacity will be exploited to the fullest in following up the outcome of the major international meetings, particularly of the Millennium Summit that resulted in a declaration of the political will of the world's leaders to achieve certain objectives for the betterment of humankind.

UN-NGO-IRENE will be supported through the intermediary activities of designated regional / sub-regional coordinator organizations. During the Aracaju meeting, such organizations have already been identified for Asia and the Pacific, Eastern Europe, and Latin America. The Tunisia Meeting aimed to agree on five African NGOs to serve as sub-regional coordinators and one of them as regional coordinator. For the remaining regions, the network will be expanded similarly to cover the whole sector of NGOs.

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 NGO Section/DESA, as informal partners in its implementation.

Hope For the Nations, an NGO in consultative status with ECOSOC, hosted the Forum to launch the Canadian UN-NGO-IRENE/Canada in Kelowna, British Columbia, Canada from 18<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> February 2004 in partnership with the NGO Section of UN DESA. It is important to mention that Canada was the first developed country to launch UN-NGO-IRENE.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Forum to launch the UN-NGO Informal Regional Network in (UN-NGO-IRENE/Canada) took place in Kelowna, British Columbia, Canada, from 18<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> February, 2004.

Held with the support of the Federal Parliament, the partnership of the City of Kelowna and the sponsorship of the business community of Kelowna, the Forum was hosted by Hope For The Nations and jointly organized with the NGO Section of United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA). The Forum was opened by the Deputy Mayor of the City of Kelowna, Mrs. Sharon Shepherd, Ms. Hanifa Mezoui, Chief of the NGO Section, Office for Economic and Social Council Support and Coordination of UNDESA and Mr. Ralph Bromley, President, Hope for the Nations. It was addressed by Mr. Stockwell Day, M.P. the Foreign Affairs Critic and also the Vice Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee for Parliament, and Mr. Werner Schmidt, M.P. Mr. Nick Arkle, UN representative for Hope for the Nations, organized and coordinated the event. The Forum was facilitated by Ms. Najet Karaborni, Senior Advisor and UN-NGO-IRENE Project Coordinator / UNDESA and Mr. Lance Wallnau, President of the Lance Learning Group.

Participants included:

- ◆ **Representatives of 42 Canadian NGOs** representing 12 Canadian NGOs with consultative status with ECOSOC and 30 other leading and dynamic NGOs;
- ◆ **Two officials** from the **United Nations Secretariat**, Department of Economic and Social Affairs;
- ◆ **163 partners and sponsors** representing the Kelowna public and business community, and
- ◆ **110 Youth** representatives from various Kelowna area schools (14-18 year olds).

The meeting agreed on the relevance and the need for an Informal Regional Network of NGOs in Canada. NGO representatives noticed that such an initiative was a timely one.

It was agreed that the primary focus for the Network should be on the Canadian NGOs with consultative status with ECOSOC (now 82), 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.

Building on the work of existing NGO coalitions, participants underlined the need for the Network to be quickly operational to facilitate the access of Canadian NGOs to the global scene. One of the important added values of this Network would also be its responsiveness to the diversity of Canada 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 Canadian 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. Hope For The Nations, as the regional coordinator, was asked to take responsibility for this in collaboration with Mrs. Najet Karaborni, Senior Interregional Adviser/DESA and UN-NGO-IRENE 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 candid discussions, the meeting agreed on the following major issues:

### **The Objectives**

The following objectives were agreed:

1. To strengthen partnerships between Canadian NGOs and the United Nations;
2. The network should serve as a focal point and clearing house among Canadian ECOSOC accredited NGOs;
3. To establish permanent dialogue and direct contacts between NGOs, the NGO Section/DESA and the United Nations in general.

### **Structure**

It was agreed that the structure of the Network would be flexible and open, and optimize the use of 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.

Sub-regional representations of the Canadian Network may be established in the future to better serve the needs of the beneficiaries of the Network.

### **Strategic Action Plan**

The meeting concluded with a discussion of a Strategic Action Plan, which included the goals and activities proposed by participating NGOs, partners, the NGO Section/DESA and the other UN officials. The Strategic Action Plan will be included in the final report of the meeting.

### **Contribution of the partners and of the NGO Section/DESA**

In addition to the detailed proposals to be included in the Strategic Action Plan, partners of the Network would contribute to the flow of information.

The NGO Section of DESA would provide a range of services, including regular flows of information to assist NGOs in making full use of their consultative status with ECOSOC. It was proposed that a UN-NGO-IRENE/ Canada newsletter be produced.