

**CAPACITY BUILDING MEETING TO LAUNCH
THE UN-NGO INFORMAL REGIONAL NETWORK IN CASPIAN REGION**

Baku, Azerbaijan, 25 – 28 November 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 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), launched 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 during the Bucharest Meeting in Romania with two sub-regional coordinators and one regional coordinator.

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

In the framework of the worldwide development of the UN-NGO-IRENE and of its implementation in the remaining regions, a High Level Consultation and Capacity Building programme for the UN-NGO-IRENE in Azerbaijan and in the Caspian (Caucasian/Central Asia) Region was organized by Fund of Aid for Youth (FAY) and National Assembly of Youth Organizations of Republic of Azerbaijan (NAYORA), two leading NGOs in consultative status with ECOSOC on 26 – 27 November 2004 in partnership with the NGO Section / ECOSOC of UN DESA and the support of the United Nations System in Azerbaijan and the Government of Azerbaijan.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Capacity Building Meeting to launch the UN-NGO Informal Regional Network in Azerbaijan (UN-NGO-IRENE/ Azerbaijan) took place in Conference Center of FAY in Baku, Azerbaijan on 26 – 27 November 2004.

Hosted by FAY and NAYORA, two leading NGOs in consultative status with ECOSOC, the Meeting was organized in partnership with the 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 Azerbaijan and UNDP Office in Azerbaijan. In welcoming the participants, the President of FAY, Mr. Nedim Kaya and the chairperson of the NAYORA, Mr. Fuad Muradov highlighted the importance of the Capacity building Meetings to launch the UN-NGO Informal Regional Network not only in Azerbaijan (UN-NGO-IRENE/ Azerbaijan) but also in the Caspian Region (Caucasian/Central Asia). In bringing together the Azerbaijani Civil Society and the Caspian one, the Meetings aimed to enhance the exchange of experiences among NGOs and strengthen the NGO role at national and regional level.

On behalf of the UN system in Azerbaijan, the UNDP Deputy Resident Representative, Mr. David Eizenberg underlined the UN contribution to the NGO sector development in Azerbaijan and its involvement by all UN agencies in the UN work on MDGs. The UNDESA Representative, Ms. Najet Karaborni reminded the background of the UN-NGO-IRENE focusing on the priority given by the NGO Section/ECOSOC of DESA to capacity building programmes for NGOs in consultative status of countries with economies in transition as recommended by the ECOSOC Resolution of 1996 and the General Assembly of 1999, especially as the Caspian region has only five NGOs in consultative status. She also underlined the role played by the Permanent Mission of Azerbaijan in New York and the hosting NGOs in organizing such Meetings so rapidly and efficiently. She thanked the Government of Azerbaijan, UNDP and other UN agencies for their full support to the Meetings. Mr. Civili, the Assistant Secretary General of UNDESA gave impetus to the Meetings through his encouragements during the Meeting held in his office in New York on 19 November 2004 with the chief of the NCO Section, Ms. Hanifa Mezoui, the First Secretary of the Permanent Mission of Azerbaijan in UN, Mr. Elshad Isgandarov and the Senior Advisor Ms. Karaborni.

The Deputy Minister of Youth, Sport and Tourism Mr. Intigam Babayev expressed his appreciation and thanks for this important initiative and stressed the full support of the Government of Azerbaijan to NGOs in order to play a significant role. It is important to mention that the Office of the President of Azerbaijan was represented by Mr. Arastun Mehtiyev Chief of Public Relation Department, who stressed the support of the President to the Meetings, the regional cooperation, the NGO sector development and the civil society in general. Dr. of International Law of the Baku State University, Mr. Rustam Mammadov explained the evolution of the NGO sector in the Caspian Region focusing on NGOs' role in strengthening regional cooperation.

The Meeting was conducted by Ms Najet Karaborni who made the two following power point presentations:

- ◆ ECOSOC and its relationship with NGOs: NGO Consultative status with ECOSOC
- ◆ UN-NGO-IRENE and NGO Capacity Building within Participatory Governance

UN Resident Coordinator Special Adviser, Mr. Shahin Panahov did a PPT presentation on Update on the Millennium Development Goals.

Mr. Elshad Iskanderov, First Secretary of Azerbaijan Permanent Mission to the United Nations in New York made a presentation on “UN-NGO cooperation and role in conflict prevention and resolution”. He also chaired the closing session of the Meeting. In his closing speech, he warmly thanked the participants and expressed on behalf of the Government of Azerbaijan, the participants and himself 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 leadership and commitment and Mr. Patrizio Civili, Assistant Secretary General of UNDESA for his strong support to UN-NGO-IRENE development.

At the Closing Session, the representative of the Turkish NGO, “Istanbul International Brotherhood and Solidarity Association”, Mr. Ahmet Tecim proposed to host in Istanbul, Turkey and cosponsor with the NGO Section/ECOSOC of DESA and UN-NGO-IRENE/Caspian Region a follow-up Meeting for the Caspian Region to start implement its strategic action plan. He also proposed to hold at the same time a Capacity building Meeting to launch UN-NGO-IRENE in Turkey with the support of the UN-NGO-IRENE/NGO section. The Turkish proposal was welcomed and highly appreciated by all the participants.

71 Participants attended the Meeting as follows:

- ◆ **8 NGOs from the Caspian region** (Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan) attended the meeting as observers with a view to launch similar meeting in their respective country in the near future
- ◆ **7 representatives of the United Nations (DESA, UNDP, UNFPA, DPI, IOM, UNIFEM, UN)**
- ◆ **17 Partners and Sponsors** representing the Press, the business community and donors
- ◆ **31 Representatives of 26 Azerbaijani NGOs** representing. NGOs in consultative status with ECOSOC and other leading and dynamic NGOs;
- ◆ **7 high-level government representatives** attended at the official Opening and Closing Ceremonies.
- ◆ **1 NGO from Turkey as observer**

The meeting agreed on the relevance and the need for an Informal Regional Network of NGOs in Caspian region. 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 NGOs in consultative status with ECOSOC in 2004, 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 Caspian region NGOs to the global scene. One of the important added values of this Network would also be its responsiveness to the diversity of Caspian 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 Caspian regional 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. Found of Aid for Youth as the national 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 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 Caspian region NGOs, the United Nations, Government, Corporate Sector and Donor Community;
2. The network should serve as a focal point and clearing house among Caspian 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 national level:

1. **Poverty Reduction (MDG 1):** Business Women Association – **Uzbekistan,**
2. **Education (MDG 2)** : Kazakhstan Association of the Customs Brokers, Green Earth foundation - Georgia
3. **Gender Equality /Women Empowerment (MDG 3):** Kyrgyzstan Forum of Women NGO's
4. **Health (MDGs 4, 5 and 6)** : National Assembly of Youth Organizations of the Republic of Azerbaijan (NAYORA) in collaboration with "Buta" Children Humanitarian Foundation
5. **Environment (MDG 7)** : ECORES – Azerbaijan, International Center for Environmental Research - Georgia
6. **Peace and Conflict Prevention (Millennium Declaration) :** International Associations of Young Diplomats - Georgia
7. **Human Rights (Millennium Declaration)** : "EL" Development Center, International Charitable Foundation "Merrim" - Georgia

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/Caspian 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. CONTRIBUTION OF THE PARTNERS AND OF THE NGO SECTION/ ECOSOC/UNDESA

In addition to the 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/ Caspian newsletter be produced.

V. ENLIGHTENMENT IN THE PRESS

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

8 media representatives attended at the meeting. The event was enlightened on State TV Chanel – AzTV twice, LIDER TV and MIR TV (MIR TV is broadcasting in more than 8 countries).

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.

VI. VISIT TO NGO PROJECT

The participants of the Meeting visited the **Community Development Center** in Baku. After the presentation on the project activities made by the project managers, a friendly discussion followed particularly on the training activities of the project and their impact on the beneficiaries and especially the local authorities and NGOs. All participants appreciated the visit, exchanged their respective experiences in this field and expressed their wish to develop such projects in their countries with the help of the Community Development Center and the coordination of the newly established UN-NGO-IRENE. NGO Representatives expressed their high interest in working with NAYORA as national coordinator of UN-NGO-IRENE/Azerbaijan and FAY as regional coordinator of UN-NGO-IRENE/Caspian.