



DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS  
OFFICE FOR ECOSOC SUPPORT AND COORDINATION  
**UN-NGO-IRENE UPDATE**

Issue 30  
August 2008

**IN THE SPOTLIGHT:  
WORLD'S FIRST REGIONAL CENTRE OF  
EXCELLENCE ON MDGS LAUNCHED**



The Asian Institute of Technology (AIT) has been designated by the United Nations as the permanent site of the world's first Regional Centre of Excellence on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), dedicated to the promotion and achievement of the MDGs in South-East Asia through education and training. The creation of the ASEAN Regional Center of Excellence took place during the ASEAN Region Roundtable meeting on 24-25 March 2008 at the campus of AIT in Pathumthani, Thailand. The high-level event was co-organized by the NGO Section of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), UN-ECOSOC, and AIT.



**Endorsement** United Nations Secretary-General Mr. Ban-Ki Moon at the presentation of the world's first Regional Centre of Excellence on MDGs

In an audio visual remark given on 25 March in the context of an international meeting titled "ECOSOC's Promotion and Achievement of Millennium Development Goals Through Education and Outreach", United Nations Secretary-General Mr.

Ban Ki-moon gave his full endorsement for the creation of the ASEAN Regional Center and he emphasized that "the new Centre and its local regional affiliates will provide continuity for [current] initiatives. They will also serve as key MDG hubs promoting development activities throughout the region."

On its part, UN-DESA NGO Section representatives explained that the Regional Center of Excellence on MDGs will essentially promote the insertion of MDG training modules in their academic institutions, civil society and NGOs. With the help of local sponsors, it will finance the development of new training modules in priorities areas of the regions. It will organize regional think tanks and expert meetings on how to best achieve the MDGs through educational and training tools and actions. It will submit for course accreditation and validation to UNITAR new training modules on MDGs developed at the regional, national and local levels.

Thus, the actions of the Regional Centre of Excellence for MDG trainers would consist of:

- 1) Proposing training modules on the MDGs in educational establishments and training centres (training trainers) alongside NGOs, governments, local authorities and the private sector, both via the Internet and out in the field;
- 2) Developing new methodologies, approaches, training tools and educa-

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Submit your Best Practice  
to be included on the  
UN-NGO-IRENE  
Best Practices Network  
website  
[www.un.org/esa/coordination/ngo/irene](http://www.un.org/esa/coordination/ngo/irene)

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tional techniques using multimedia, the Internet, distance learning and other training techniques with a view to integrating the issues relating to the MDGs into educational syllabuses;

- 3) Encouraging co-operation between the various actors involved in civil society in terms of raising awareness, education, and training concerning the MDGs.

During the initial stage, at least, the Regional Centre of Excellence will constitute a quality label granted to institutions wishing to develop training programmes with a view to realize and implement the MDGs in the ASEAN region.

This Regional Centre of Excellence is a result of the establishment of the World Centre of Excellence for MDGs trainers, in partnership with the UN-NGO-IRENE/ECOSOC network, with UNITAR, Sciences Po, the Foundation for Research on Migration and Technology integration (FORMIT) and several UN agencies concerned by the MDGs. This World Center of Excellence, which would co-operate closely with this Regional Center in Asia, and three others to be established in Africa, Latin America and Europe, is online and hosted by the International Association of Economic and Social Councils and Similar Institutions (AICESIS) since 27 September 2007 on <http://www.omdg.org> 

## NGO COMMITTEE PAPERLESS COMMITTEE SYSTEM RECEIVES UN 21 AWARDS



Honouring Outstanding Staff Initiatives

In the UN21 Awards event held in the United Nations Headquarters on last July 11, the Paperless Committee System received the 2007 award in the category of Process Reengineering.

The system, developed, used and maintained by the NGO Section of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), was introduced in 2003 as an electronic meeting and an online document management system, used by members of the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) during deliberations on applications of NGOs seeking consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

Prior to the Paperless Committee System, these interactions, as well as the official documentation containing the application material were all done in hard copy, adding up to tens of thousands of pages of paper per year, lost in staff hours and financial resources.

These have, however, changed since the project was first put to test in 2002. The electronic meeting and record management system enables informal consultations with the Committee on NGOs and facilitates electronic communication with NGOs scattered across the globe, especially those from the south. The System is accessible both in the conference room and remotely via the Internet, making it possible for members to consult the system from their missions and their capital cities, thus bringing the concept of informal consultations to a whole new level.

The project has also ensured online access to electronic versions of all documents required for the Committee's session in all

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six UN official languages, while official records are made available in English as mandated in Resolution 50/11 on multilingualism.

Hailed as a "Green or an environmentally friendly initiative", the Paperless Committee has reduced large volume of photocopying and preparation of binders and printed documents for each session, helping to re-allocate human re-



**Mapping** Each applying organization is pinned on a map, innovatively showing the geographic distribution of civil society interest in the work of ECOSOC

sources to more substantive tasks. Over 100 binders and more than 80,000 hardcopies of documents were previously prepared for each session. A total of 59 meetings were saved over a five-year period due to the electronic meeting system, and a savings of over \$1.8 million has been made. The Committee on NGOs will now hold 60 meetings per biennium as against 100.

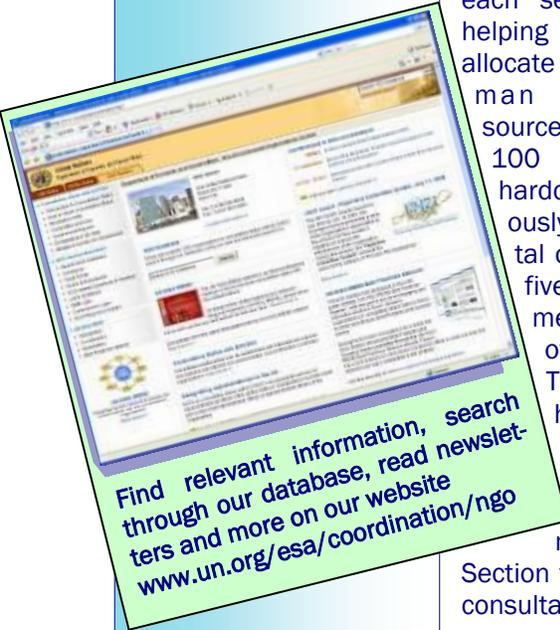
Quadrennial reports management system widely used in the Section to manage follow-up with NGOs in consultative status with ECOSOC has also

improved. The number of quadrennial reports received by the Committee went up by 90 percent, with submission to the 2007 Session alone going up by 65 percent.

There has been a significant increase in the number of NGOs that are granted consultative status due to the elimination of the cumbersome paperwork and the easy facilitation through the website, which makes it possible for more applicants to be reviewed and granted status.

In addition, the project has facilitated increased involvement of external parties, mainly civil society groups, in the work of the Committee, and is being seen as a major multi-stakeholder successful partnership initiative.

Nonetheless, the system is a work in progress, as it was completely revamped for the 2008 Resumed Session of the Committee in January, transforming it from a record storage system to a full scale professional record management system, with the introduction of many new features (see Mapping).



Find relevant information, search through our database, read newsletters and more on our website [www.un.org/esa/coordination/ngo](http://www.un.org/esa/coordination/ngo)

**NGO COMMITTEE  
SUMMARY OF THE RESUMED 2008 SESSION:  
STRENGTHENING UN-NGO-IRENE**

During the 2008 Resumed session of the Committee on NGOs, the members of the Committee considered applications from 123 organizations applying for general, special or Roster consultative status with the Council, including 68 applications deferred from previous sessions. It recommended 65 applications for consultative status and deferred 54 others. The Com-

mittee was able to review 136 quadrennial reports submitted by organizations in general and special status, including 76 reports carried over from 2008 regular session. The committee took note of 126 of them leaving 13 pending as more clarification was needed.

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As part of its recommendations, the Committee stressed the need of establishing “a technical cooperation programme aiming at providing advisory services, the conduct of capacity-building workshops designed to launch the United Nations Non-Governmental Organization Informal Regional Network (UN-NGO-IRENE) at regional, sub-regional and national levels, and the development of training materials and the promotion of pilot joint partnership initiatives, projects and programmes involving the United Nations, the civil society and Governments worldwide, espe-

cially for the countries most in need”.

**The Committee will continue its review during the 2009 Regular session, planned to be held at United Nations headquarters from 19 to 30 January 2009.**

Recommendations by the Committee from the 2008 Regular and Resumed session was considered by the Economic and Social Council during the General Segment of the 2008 substantive session of ECOSOC on July 20, 2008 🌐

### ECOSOC HIGH-LEVEL SEGMENT CONFERENCE OF NGOS ENABLES CIVIL SOCIETY PARTICIPATION



The Conference of NGOs (CONGO) held a Civil Society Development Forum from 27-29 June in New York in preparation for the ECOSOC High-Level Segment (ECOSOC HLS) held in NY from 30 June to 3 July. Around sixty five NGOs attended the forum over the three day period. At the forum, CONGO identified seven candidates who were nominated for seven of the nine ECOSOC HLS roundtables. It is confirmed that five of these seven nominees made interventions on

their respective roundtables, and five other NGO representatives, in addition to CONGO nominees, were able to make interventions. Additionally, 10 NGOs made presentations during the General Debate on July 1 and July 2.

NGO participation on the roundtables has been quite inclusive especially in some cases where five identified seats were allocated for civil society representatives. In addition, during the ECOSOC HLS, 18 side events, 1 special event and 3 luncheons were organized by various actors of civil society. 🌐

### ECOSOC HIGH-LEVEL SEGMENT ECOSOC INNOVATION FAIR



**Thirteen organization from all over the world showcasing innovative projects in regards to the theme of ECOSOC - HLS**

The Civil Society segment of the ECOSOC Innovation Fair this year comprised of 13 organizations

from all over the world showcasing innovative projects in regards to the theme of the

High Level Segment of ECOSOC - “Implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regards to sustainable development”. The projects were

displayed in the North East Corner of the Secretariat Building, as well as in the neck area in Conference D in the Conference Room Building at the United Nations Headquarters in New York. For

more information please refer to:

<http://www.un.org/esa/coordination/ngo/irene> 🌐



## ECOSOC HIGH-LEVEL SEGMENT UN-NGO-IRENE Best Practices Network presented



In the context of the ECOSOC Innovation fair, the NGO Section of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs launched the newly developed website UN-NGO-IRENE Best Practices Network, an online tool in which organizations holding consultative status with the Economic and Social Council can submit and share best practices and success stories.

The web portal is divided into different networks. Each network has a theme; selected based on the themes of the High Level Segments of ECOSOC, as well as other topical subjects of great importance within the international development community in the fields of economic and social development.

The available projects on the web site are categorized by these networks and presented with information such as methodology, evidence of results, and impact on surrounding environment, among others. Furthermore, users are encouraged to submit pictures of their projects, making the user experience richer and the presentation even more interesting.

The UN-NGO-IRENE Best Practices Network web portal is open to the public. However, the content found on the site is exclusively contributed from organizations in consultative status with ECOSOC. User accounts are given to all these organi-

zations, allowing them to access the site in order to upload stories, comments, and rate other projects. In doing so, they take an active part in forming the information presented on the web site itself.

Civil society plays an important role in reaching the internationally agreed development goals set out in the UN agenda, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Strong relationships among NGOs working in these fields, along with a knowledge based open platform will facilitate and strengthen their contribution towards these goals.



**Interactive map selector** A feature that allows visitors to have a geographic sense of the spread of civil society around the world.

The “UN-NGO-IRENE Best Practices Network” web portal aims to empower the awareness in regards to the work being carried out by NGOs around the world, and to further increase the relationships between civil society and the United Nations.

Please visit the “UN-NGO-IRENE Best Practices Network” web portal at: <http://www.un.org/esa/coordination/ngo/irene>

### Project of the Month



“Empowering Women Farmers in Rural Zambia through Natural Agriculture” by Shinji Shumeikai (Special 2004)

Read more: <http://esango.un.org/irene/Index?page=viewPractice&nr=110>



## TOOLS AND RESOURCES

### A New Response System

Six hundred correspondence documents is transferred every year during a period of 2-3 weeks, as part of the regular sessions of the NGO Committee. That amount of information traffic demands not only speed but also a mechanism that ensure the transparency of the process. With this objective in mind the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs NGO Section introduced a new “NGO Response System” during the 2008 Resumed session in May.



**Dashboard** All relevant information is presented to the NGO to interact with the United Nations during its application

Through this information system, applicants have access to any question posed to their organization, as well as their own responses, further adding clarity to the process. Other information, such as official UN press releases mentioning their organization, and the status of their application,

is also available to all applicants with the introduction of this system.

Applicants are able to access this system by accessing the following link:

<http://esango.un.org/paperless/Web?page=static&content=response> 

## PAST MEETINGS

### ECOSOC NGO FORUM NEW YORK, 4 APRIL 2008

The ECOSOC NGO Forum took place in the ECOSOC Chambers, United Nations Headquarters in New York, from 3-6 pm on April 4, 2008 and it not only served as a simple preparatory event for the 2008 High-Level Segment of ECOSOC, but also became a platform for NGOs to share their best practices and success stories. In addition, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) NGO Section took the chance to present the “Best Practices Network” (highlighted in Page 6 of this newsletter) as the platform for continuous sharing of practices from now on. For more information of this event, please go to: <http://esa.un.org/coordination/ngo/new/index.asp?page=ngoForum>

### THIRD CONFERENCE OF UN-NGO-IRENE / ASIA-PACIFIC BEIJING, 28-30 APRIL 2008

Under the theme “Sustainable Development and Green Olympics”, the 3rd Conference of UN-NGO-IRENE / Asia Pacific held in Beijing on 28-30 April 2008 stressed on the theme of the ECOSOC High-Level Segment: “Implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to sustainable development”. During the event, co-sponsored by China NGO Network for International Exchanges (CNIE) and the NGO Section of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), the MDG World Center of Excellence website was presented (<http://www.omdg.org>) under the context of which it was highlighted the creation of the first Regional Centre of Excellence for MDGs based at the Asian Institute of Technology in Thailand.

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Find in our website the new Calendar of Events for latest information on upcoming events and meetings that relates to economic and social development.

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Furthermore, UN-NGO-IRENE Coordinators reviewed and approved the progress report outlining the achievements of the Strategic Framework agreed at the December 2006 Ammam Forum, and it was decided to continue strengthening the network by encouraging the interaction with multiple stakeholders in the civil society, including the private sector. To finalize, it was also recommended that the UN-NGO-IRENE should strengthen education and training within the scope of the UN MDGs and sustainable development. In particular this year, it was emphasized that the United Nations, through the Office of the Special Advisor to the UN Secretary-General on Sports, Peace and Development, should take the Beijing Olympiad as an opportunity to launch the publicity and education campaign on “sports for sustainable development” and foster a green culture to guide the implementation of the MDGs in the long run with emphasis on the role of the youth.

### CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM ON THE GLOBAL FOOD CRISIS NEW YORK, 16 MAY 2008

“Civil Society should fight against global hunger as they constitute essential actors in the development of a potential solution

to the hunger problem”, emphasized Ms. Hanifa Mezoui, Chief of the NGO Section of ECOSOC in her opening statement to the Civil Society Forum on the Global Food Crisis held in the Dag Hammarskjold library auditorium, at the United Nations Headquarters in New York, on 16 May 2008.

This event gathered main civil society actors in a panel discussion moderated by Mr. Bruce White, Strategic Food Aid Advisor for Catholic Relief Services, and followed by a very productive debate. After the event, it was concluded that there has to be two types of actions: short term actions such as increase food aid and efficiency, implement low-interest lines of credit, and removal of commodity export and import restrictions; and medium to long-term actions such as the improvement of agricultural production in the developing world, well though through use of technology, full engagement of civil society, fulfillment of aid commitments to assist developing countries to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, dismantle trade distorting subsidies in developed markets and help developing countries adapt to climate change.

Mr. Nikhil Seth made the closing remarks where he argued that, even though the current food crisis was a pressing concern, it is offering the opportunity to focus on agriculture, and he stressed that whatever potential solution we devise, all sectors should be involved, especially the civil society.



The Civil Society Forum on the Global Food Crisis gathered main civil society actors in a panel discussion moderated by Mr. Bruce White, Strategic Food Aid Advisor for Catholic Relief Services

## Have you submitted your Quadrennial Report

This year the committee discussed measures related to quadrennial reports and adopted an oral decision to have a letter sent to the 169 NGOs that had failed to submit their quadrennial reports for more than 2 reporting periods. Remember that suspension or withdrawal of consultative status might be applied if your organization fails to submit the quadrennial report on time.

## UPCOMING MEETINGS

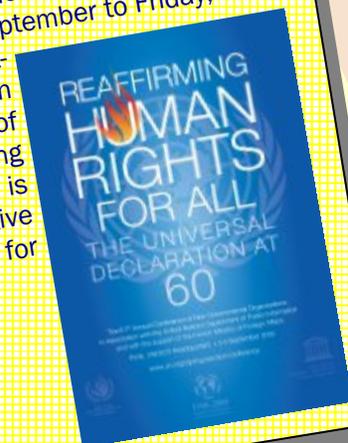
### HIGH-LEVEL EVENT ON MDGS NEW YORK, 25 SEPTEMBER 2008

The UN Secretary-General and the President of the UN General Assembly will convene a High-level Event on the Millennium Development Goals at UN Headquarters in New York on 25 September 2008. "This gathering will bring together world leaders, representatives of the private sector and our civil society partners to discuss specific ways to energize our efforts. I expect the meeting will also send a strong message that governments are ready to rise to the financing for development challenge. [...] Together, we must make this year one of unprecedented progress for the poorest of the poor, so that we can realize a better, more prosperous future for all." - UN Secretary General Ban-Ki moon, 1 April 2008 (remarks to the General Assembly)

**END POVERTY 2015** *Make it happen*  
MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

### DPI/NGO CONFERENCE PARIS, 3-5 SEPTEMBER 2008

The 61st Annual Conference for Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) associated with the United Nations Department of Public Information (UNDPI), will be held in Paris at UNESCO Headquarters from Wednesday, 3 September to Friday, 5 September 2008. This is the first time it will take place outside the UN Headquarters in New York. To mark the sixtieth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, this year's Conference is entitled "Reaffirming Human Rights for All: The Universal Declaration at 60" and is being organized in partnership with the NGO/DPI Executive Committee, UNESCO, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Government of France.



## EDITORIAL NOTE

The UN-NGO-IRENE Update is a publication prepared by the NGO Section of the Office of ECOSOC Support and Coordination – Department of Economic and Social Affairs. This Newsletter is not an official document of the United Nations nor does it express the official position of the United Nations. Editorial team: Hanifa Mezoui, Patty Elahi, Ola Goransson and Diego Rumiany.

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