

## Introduction

The revolution in global communications within the context of rapid economic, political, and cultural globalization has led to an extraordinary level of non-governmental attention to, and increasing participation in, multilateral policy development and decision-making, and even implementation. Civil society entities, a category that extends beyond NGOs to include a broad range of professional and religious groupings, as well as special interest associations and coalitions,<sup>1</sup> are increasingly engaged in cooperative undertakings with governments and “are forming a vast number of connections across national borders and inserting themselves into a wide range of decision-making processes on issues from international security to human rights to the environment.”<sup>2</sup>

Global governance, like its national and local counterparts, goes through multiple stages, from the identification of particular issues for attention, to the mobilization of popular support and the development of political will to support action on such issues, to the legislative or decision making processes themselves, and then to implementation and enforcement of policies and commitments agreed to. Civil society is now engaged in all of these stages.<sup>3</sup> And within civil society, NGOs in particular have emerged as centres of policy research, analysis, and advocacy that are actively engaged with governments and multilateral institutions.

A broad range of multilateral documents and events has welcomed and emphasized the importance of these engaged NGOs’ participation in multilateral governmental discussions and negotiations.<sup>4</sup> The UN Secretary-General’s 2002 report on strengthening the UN also acknowledges and affirms this engagement:

*Actors from civil society and the private sector are increasingly involved in international cooperation at every level, from the local to the global. Their form of involvement ranges from advancing ideas and proposals to concrete activities, such as the delivery of public health services or food aid. Their indispensable contribution is widely recognized. That is why, in the Millennium Declaration, Member States resolved to give greater opportunities to the private sector, non-governmental organizations and civil society, in general, to contribute to the realization of the Organization’s goals and programmes.*<sup>5</sup>

The 1992 Rio UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), for example, included the substantial participation of NGOs in the development of the environmental action plan, which specifically recognized the importance of NGO action in support of sustainable development. The *Agenda 21* action plan acknowledges that NGOs “... possess well-established and diverse experience, expertise, and capacity in fields ... of particular importance to the implementation and review of environmentally

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<sup>1</sup> The Commission on Sustainable Development refers to the role of “major groups” in the context of the CSD, drawing on the Agenda 21 definition of such groups as: “women, children and youth, indigenous people, NGOs, local authorities, workers and their trade unions, business and industry, the scientific and technology community and farmers.” (“Follow-up to Johannesburg and the Future Role of the CSD – The Implementation Track,” Report of the Secretary-General, Commission on Sustainable Development, Feb 18, 2003, E/CN.17/2003/2, para 70).

<sup>2</sup> Ann M. Florini and P.J. Simmons, “What the World Needs Now?”, in Ann M. Florini (ed.), *The Third Force: The Rise of Transnational Civil Society*, Japan Center for International Exchange, Tokyo, and Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, DC, 2000, p. 3. Quoted by David Atwood (UNIDIR, No. 1, 2002, p. 6).

<sup>3</sup> “*Agenda-setting* is that stage of the policy process when the nature and scope of a problem are being identified and the need for international regulation is being determined. The *negotiation-bargaining* stage is when the actual process of negotiating and bargaining occurs, traditionally regarded as an activity in which only sovereign states participate. Once the deals are done and new policies or rules are agreed, there ensues a two-phase process: an *implementation* phase, which typically consists of mainly national process to execute the agreements reached at international level; and a *compliance-enforcement* phase, which concerns processes to ensure that states comply with the newly created international obligations. (Simon Carroll, “NGO access to multilateral fora: does disarmament lag behind?” *Disarmament Forum* [UNIDIR, No. 1, 2000], p. 18).

<sup>4</sup> Among several studies and reports documenting this involvement in some detail are:

*United Nations Legislative History: General Assembly Resolution on NGO Access*, prepared by the office of the World Federalist Movement for The International NGO Task Group on Legal and Institutional Matters (INTGLIM), February 17, 2000.

Reference Document on the Participation of Civil Society in United Nations Conferences and Special Sessions of the General Assembly During the 1990s, Office of the President of the General Assembly of the United Nations, Version May 23, 2001.

*Creating Global Governance: The Role of Non-Governmental Organizations in the United Nations*, (by Antti Pentikainen, Finnish UN Association, Helsinki 2000 [<http://www.ykliitto.fi/uutta/gover.pdf>], 108 pp .

<sup>5</sup> *Strengthening of the United Nations: an agenda for further change*, Report of the Secretary-General (United Nations, General Assembly, September 9, 2002, A/57/387), para 133. The Secretary-General used this report to announce “a panel of eminent persons to review the relationship between the United Nations and civil society and offer practical recommendations for improved modalities of interaction” (Action 19, para 141).