

The GENEVA memo

Report on the International Conference for the Reform of International Institutions by the UBUNTU Forum Secretariat.



GENEVA, SWITZERLAND, 20&21 NOVEMBER 2006

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Introduction

UN summits (for example, the recent gatherings held in Monterrey on Financing for Development and in Johannesburg on Sustainable Development) have given rise to extremely interesting declarations and action plans but without the resources to fulfil them. Moreover, much of the responsibility has been shifted to the 'global market'. In the light of these circumstances, there is a need for in-depth analysis on how the System of International Institutions should re-orientate towards a greater, if any, ability to bring about global solutions to current global problems. In a world in which conflict, violence, fundamentalism, etc. seem to be winning the war over peace and individual and collective human rights, analysis and alternative wide-ranging proposals are more urgently required today than ever before. **The urgent need for a "World Campaign for In-depth Reform of the System of International Institutions" has already been confirmed.**

We believe there is a need for a gathering to continue earlier studies and conferences and to analyse and put forward proposals for a new direction in the system of multilateral international institutions. Hence, at the meeting of the Coordinating Committee of the UBUNTU Forum and Organising Committee of the World Campaign in February 2006, it was decided to call an international conference between different levels of governance and civil society actors to serve as the framework for one of the Campaign's objectives: **"contributing to the construction of an international social and political movement that is capable of being the stimulus for the process or processes of reform."** We envisaged these dialogues as the beginning of the road towards shaping, articulating, defining... a global social and political alliance of many actors, which will be able to promote advances towards the goal of real reform of the multilateral international institutions.

The International Conference for the Reform of International Institutions took place in Geneva, Switzerland, on 20-21st November 2006. Over 250 representatives from states and regional associations of states, autonomous governments and local authorities, parliamentary organisations and, of course, civil society organisations came together to analyse and reflect on alternatives to reform and improve the system.

CONFERENCIA INTERNACIONAL PARA LA REFORMA DE LAS INSTITUCIONES INTERNACIONALES



DIÁLOGOS ENTRE DISTINTOS NIVELES DE GOBERNABILIDAD Y ACTORES DE LA SOCIEDAD CIVIL



General view of the room

Speakers

Participating Governments and Groups of Governments

Luis Alfonso de Alba	Ambassador, Permanent Representative to UN Office in Geneva (UNOG) and President of the Human Rights Council; Mexico
Carlos S. Duarte	Plenipotentiary Minister, Permanent Representative at the UN in New York; Brazil
Juan Eguiguren	Deputy Permanent Representative, Permanent Mission to UNOG; Chile
Emmanuel Farcot	First Secretary, Permanent Mission to UNOG; France
Juan M. González de Linares	Deputy Director General for United Nations, Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Spain
Mikel Iriso	Responsible for EU and Multilateral Organisations in the Division of Development Policies, Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Spain
Dumisani Kumalo	G77 Chairman and Permanent Representative of South Africa to UN
Alexandre G. L. Parola	Counsellor, Permanent Mission to UNOG; Brazil
Marjatta Rasi	Under-Secretary of State for International Development Cooperation and Policy, Ministry for Foreign Affairs; Finland
Jürg Streuli	Ambassador of Switzerland, Permanent Representative to UNOG
Hesham Youssef	Chief of the Cabinet for the Secretary General of the League of Arab States

Other participating Levels of Government

- From the field of **UN International Organisations** or related to them:

Detlef Kotte	Division on Globalization and Development Strategies of the UNCTAD
Tony Hill	Coordinator of the UN Non-Governmental Liaison Service - NGLS
Patricia Lewis	Director of UN Institute for Disarmament Research
Sergei Ordzhonikidze	General Director of UNOG (<i>represented by Ricardo Espinosa</i>)
Juan Somavía	General Director of the International Labour Organisation - ILO

- From the field of **other governmental actors and international associations of governmental actors**:

Martha Chouchena-Rojas	Head Policy, Biodiversity and International Agreements - IUCN
John Clarke	European Commission Deputy Permanent Representative to UNOG - CE
Remo Gysin	Member of the International Council of Parliamentarians for Global Action - PGA
Konrad Otto-Zimmermann	Secretary General of the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives - ICLEI
Wanyancha James Mnanka	Pan-African Parliament - PAP
Yash Tandon	Executive Director of South Centre

Civil Society Actors

Anna Biondi	International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC)
Roberto Bissio	Social Watch
Renata Bloem	Conference of NGOs in Consultative Relationship with United Nations (CONGO)
Eduardo Estevez	International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC)
John Foster	North-South Institute
Martin Khor	Third World Network
Tomas Magnusson	International Peace Bureau (IPB)
Federico Mayor	
Moema Miranda	Brazilian Institute of Social and Economic Analysis (IBASE)
Lene Schumacher	World Federalist Movement (WFM)
Ted Van Hees	Oxfam-Novib
Gunnar Westberg	International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War

Moderators: Gemma Adaba (ITUC), Fatma Allo (DAWN), Aldo Caliarì (CIDSE), Gustavo Capdevila (IPS), Miquel de Paladella (GMC), Vicente García-Delgado (CIVICUS), Sara Longwe (FEMNET), Paul Ortega (Pax Romana), Cyril Ritchie (CONGO), Josep Xercavins (UBUNTU Forum).

General views on a new Global Democratic Governance

The following Plenary Dialogue offered answers to questions raised in the earlier dialogue with regard to poverty, gender equality, environment, decent work, peace and human security, etc. According to Marjatta Rasi, representative of the Government of Finland and former president of ECOSOC, *various stakeholders, governments, civil society, business community, private sector, international organisations, academia, media can play a major role in accelerating thinking of global problem solving and on implementing global commitments.*



▲ Marjatta Rasi speaking



▲ Moema Miranda speaking

On a more systemic note, civil society actor Moema Miranda, from IBASE in Brazil, made a strong critic of the current system that is not neutral, she argued, but designed to foster the accumulation of capital by a certain elite. The afternoon of November 20th started dividing the participants into three smaller groups to allow more space for debate. Two Parallel Dialogues reflected on the reform of the system of international institutions from different standpoints: that of the world's regionalisation and that of the other levels of governance and civil society. Simultaneously, a self-organised meeting presented the "Declaration of Luarca on the Human Right to Peace".

Development, Financing and Trade

John Foster:

"The potential revenue from a tiny Currency Transaction Tax is enormous, thus the strategic importance of having even a small group of countries which will take the leadership on this issue can hardly be overstated. And the fact that one progressively led country is considering it offers an opportunity which civil society advocates should not miss. It might not come again."

The first day of Conference ended with a Plenary Dialogue on Development, Financing and Trade. **Both civil society and governmental participants reflected on necessary reforms to ensure that the governments of developed countries, the BWIs and the private sector take the necessary action and introduce the necessary measures to comply with the commitments, agreements and decisions reached at UN conferences and summits, including the MDGs.** Regulations and standards governing multilateral trade relations were also analysed and proposals were made to turn them into a real factor in sustainable human development. Ted Van Hees, from Novib Oxfam, endorsed the principles of transparency and accountability, challenging donor countries to open their books and be transparent in their transactions to the South and how to debate them with parliaments, civil society, etc. **According to him, more funds are leaving developing countries than aid being received.**

Detlef Kotte, the UNCTAD representative, told the participants not to expect IFIs to reform themselves. As an example, Kotte explained how IMF is now facing a situation of reform, but that it might be needed for developing countries to identify certain areas to push for reform in the international financing system. These are objectives that civil society organisations can share, and thus there might be a way forward in issue-based coalitions of countries, with the support of civil society. **Coalitions were also mentioned by Alexandre L.G. Parola, representative of the Brazilian Government. According to this veteran negotiator at WTO rounds, there is a fundamental injustice on how trading system is organized.** Parola conceded that the market is a very impressive tool of generating wealth and that it can be very efficient allocating resources. *But*, he asked to all participants, *should markets be responsible for distributing wealth? Conclusion does not follow: that is political, not economic discussion*, he stated. **Martin Khor, from Third World Network, denounced that IMF and WB policies of rapid liberalization of trade and finance have not worked in many countries. On the contrary, they have destroyed industry and threatened local agriculture.** WTO did not receive better compliments from Khor.

Labelling the institution as an *emerging rich mans' club*, he nonetheless argued that the multilateral institution was trying to define its identity, with developing countries. Martin Khor ended with an appeal to *take the global back to the local: the revolution that has taken place in civil society is important and is beginning to have an impact on UN, WB, IMF, etc.* And it can get better, he stated, *if we could have unity between North and South NGOs 60 years after all these global institutions were created.*

TUESDAY 21

Peace, Human Rights, Human Security and Disarmament

Tuesday, November 21st, started with a Plenary Dialogue on Peace, Human Rights, Human Security and Disarmament. The variety of speakers that warmed up the session paved the way for a lively debate among all participants. There was a sense of urgency in this debate. **Gunnar Westberg, from International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War, argued that, while nuclear war remains the greatest threat, the international institutions that should work to prevent it are there. But they need to be used and to be strengthened.** Furthermore, he called for one additional and missing element, the popular movement that will force the necessary political will.

Concept of disarmament was widened by Patricia Lewis, director of UNIDIR. According to her, disarmament seeks to increase human security in the daily life. **Hence Lewis challenged the tendency to narrow the disarmament debate to state security: what if states don't place security of the people within the state as a priority, but only of their elites? she asked.** It is when we have disagreement in such matters, that structures matter and can make a difference. To reform them, a good start can be a *small group of countries that agree, who have a passion, an idea and can see a way to achieve it.*



▲ Luis Alfonso de Alba speaking

Luis Alfonso de Alba:

"I call upon civil society to challenge the UN Human Rights Council to improve and push forward its institutional work."

Patricia Lewis:

"I strongly believe that the only way we are going to get nuclear disarmament is when politicians are made to take notice of it by the people who vote for them: the power is actually civil society."

On human rights, the creation of the Human Rights Council was highlighted as the main achievement of the reform process up to date, despite being only a part of it. **Luis Alfonso de Alba, its current President, argued that the new Council is no longer a tool restricted to governments but directly open to civil society. He called upon civil society to challenge the UN body to improve and push forward its institutional work.**

Short-term Reforms

Short-term reforms were the topic of the following Plenary Dialogue. During the following next two hours, speakers and participants brainstormed possible short-term reforms to improve the system of international institutions. Martha Chouchena-Rojas, from IUCN, argued that organisations such as WTO and BWI should mainstream environment. According to her, civil society has a very important role in terms of the environmental governance system, and this could include working to provide scientific information, to advocate, to hold leaders accountable, etc. Her call was also directed to the private sector, since technologies need to be developed. John Foster, researcher at The North-South Institute, and Roberto Bissio, from Social Watch, stressed financing for



▲ From left to right: Roberto Bissio, Marta Chouchena-Rojas, Mikel Iriso, John Clarke, John Foster, Miquel de Paladella

development as an area where short-term reform was necessary and possible. Foster described several FfD processes, such as the review of the Monterrey Conference, which opens the door to governance reform as it includes systemic issues, and the “Leading group on innovative financing”, which he labelled as *one of the most important initiatives in recent years*. **Concerning Monterrey, Foster argued that the preparatory process which is to begin in 2007 is an opportunity to engage with governments and multilateral institutions, as consultations are to be “open, inclusive and transparent” and will engage the “full involvement of all relevant stakeholders” and involve “modalities used in the preparation” of the original conference. In terms of Innovative Financing, he emphasized that the potential revenue from a tiny Currency Transaction Tax is enormous.**

Hence, the strategic importance of having even a small group of countries which will take the leadership on this issue can hardly be overstated. Roberto Bissio also touched upon taxes. While giving full credit to FfD initiatives, he reminded all participants that *the amount of money that is being evaded from the south to fiscal havens and to the north is enormous and it surpasses the total amount of aid. It follows that one of the major things in short-term reviews that could be done is tax cooperation: it is only necessary that countries to sit together, exchange information and track the tax payers, Bissio argued.* And added that *political will has to come with the means to do that, and those means were taken out of the governments by way of the rights and freedoms given to capital to move around, to hide, to establish itself, to blackmail unions and governments of what will happen if they go somewhere else. It is time, stated the Social Watch director, that some obligations are attached to such rights and freedoms.*

The after lunch session was again structured in two Parallel Dialogues and two self-organised meetings. One of the Parallel Dialogues continued the debate previously open on FfD and innovative FfD, while the second Parallel Dialogue looked at reform issues from the standpoint of multistakeholder work. Simultaneously, several participants led debates on the Report of the UN HLG for the Alliance of Civilizations as well as the Report of the UN HLG on System-Wide Coherence, which was often mentioned during both days of the Conference.

Final Plenary Dialogue: Towards a Global Democratic Governance

The Closing Plenary Dialogue reflected on the way forward, on how to build an international social and political movement capable of putting in motion a process or processes of reform of the global governance system. It provided a good opportunity to build consensus and elaborate further follow-up proposals among all the Conference participants. **Josep Xercavins, coordinator of the Campaign Secretariat, argued that civil society must have an agenda for in-depth reform, in order not to lose its bearings while dealing with daily challenges. The Campaign, he explained, aimed at defining such agenda, which would include three mid- and long-term issues: the legitimacy of the system, the refoundation of IFIs within the UN and the reform of the Security Council in order to unlock debates revolving around peace and disarmament.** Carlos S. Duarte, representing the Government of Brazil, insisted that dialogue is crucial in the face of the complexity of issues and that civil society has a very clear part on it. He envisaged a two way process, in which it is also important for governments to know what civil soc is feeling. **In terms of follow-up process, Duarte proposed this dialogue is carried forward, and maybe focus on some specific issues -on a prospective programme-, but not too much as not too loose the overall political picture.** Adding to the earlier speakers’ views, the president of the South Centre, Yash Tandon, described

Roberto Bissio:

“Political will has to come with the means to do that, and those means were taken out of the governments by way of the rights and freedoms given to capital to move around, to hide, to establish itself, to blackmail unions and governments of what will happen if they go somewhere else. It is time that some obligations are attached to such rights and freedoms.”



▲ From left to right: Josep Xercavins, Carlos S. Duarte, Fatma Allo, Yash Tandon, Ricardo Espinosa

Yash Tandon:

“I suggest this assembly gives mandate to Ubuntu to contact all those who are here and those not here but who can join this effort later in order to disseminate the ideas of this multistake dialogue widely and to create a Task Force that would organize another such meeting two years from now, that is, in 2008.”

what he considers to be the end of the current neoliberal era. At this stage, he argued, **we need to work at three levels: to work within the system, to reform the system and to transform the system so that an alternative paradigm directs the course of future history.**

The Conference ended with positive feedback of all participants, who proposed several opportunities to grab in order to promote the Campaign and give further impetus to a process of reform involving all stakeholders.



▲ Delegates participating from the floor

AFTER THE CONFERENCE

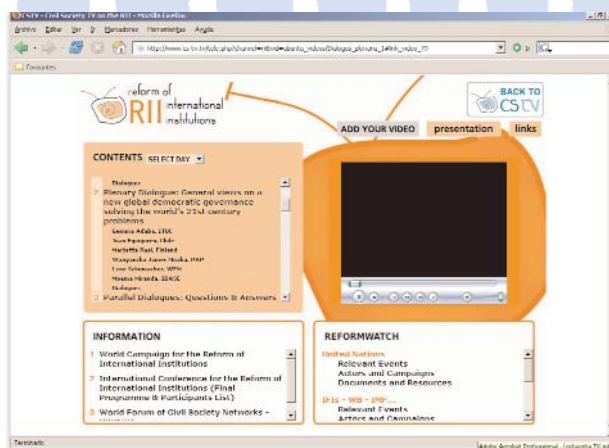
The Conference Secretariat has already begun to work on the follow-up to the dialogues. This Civil Society Internet television channel:

<http://www.cs-tv.tv/tele.php?channel=rii>

offers the possibility to review nearly all the Conference debates: speeches, issues raised from the floor, overall views, etc. It also contains links to the final programme and the list of participants.

A book on the Conference is being also compiled and edited. As we want to carry out this work as well as possible, we estimate that it will take us a month or two to complete, including translations.

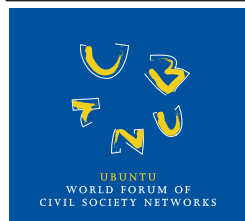
Finally, the Conference Secretariat shall also shortly begin working in the direction outlined at the last Conference Plenary Dialogue: a multi-stakeholder dialogue for the Reform of the International Institutions that will enable us to design and implement the policies necessary to successfully resolve great global problems and challenges that we are face today.



▲ RII channel at www.cs-tv.tv

Ted Van Hees:

“All these ideas and arguments, as smart as they may be, remain technical proposals, remain idle, as long as common people is not aware of them, if not fight for them: this is a lesson we have learnt in the past in our campaigns and relationship with the media.”



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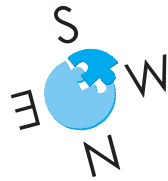
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