

**International Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations in Official Relations  
with UNESCO**

**Closing Statement**

**By  
Bernard Loing,  
President, International Conference of NGOs**

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(Original: French)

**Renewed expression of appreciation**

To those who elected this new Liaison Committee and its President;  
To all who carried out a citizen's responsibility by voting, regardless of their choice: a few less than 100 out of 330. That is an insufficient number and we need to mobilize much more participation – perhaps by tying the vote to contribution payment, as has been suggested?

You have just elected a new LC of 9 members and entrusted me once again with its leadership. I am deeply touched by this honour and am fully aware of the responsibility, especially after these first two years of experience during which I have learned so much. I shall try to be worthy of your confidence, just as my nine new partners and friends with whom I am beginning the journey over the next three years will certainly do.

**A new team**

Need I emphasize that within this newly constituted team, all of us will be equally responsible in dividing up the various tasks, regardless of the category of NGO that they represent? In this spirit, I am certain that we shall succeed in building a closely-knit, dynamic, competent and active team, like the preceding one, to which you have given your approval through the excellent report prepared by our outgoing Secretary General. Allow me, my dear Jean-Claude, to express all my friendship and to extend my warm appreciation for the immense devotion and constant availability you have always shown. I am certain that you will remain with us, as a motor force for the Education for All group and as an indispensable complement to our work and our memory.

Thus, we make up a renewed team, but some will be carrying out a second mandate. It is a good thing in any case, that the renewal be partial so that there is continuity and transmission of previous experience. It is also good to be able to count on the loyalty and competence of those who are leaving, who constitute an indispensable source of energy to pursue our action.

I would like to talk to you about the pursuit of our ongoing action, but also of its renewal and our commitment. There are three guiding principles that I hope to pursue in the next mandate:

Continuity, renewal, strengthened commitment

### **1. Continuity**

Continuity firstly in the spirit of a constructive partnership with UNESCO.

Allow me to recall the scale of this partnership with a few figures and, in a way, to what extent UNESCO needs us. The NGOs in official relations with UNESCO include 330 international organizations, some of which are federal bodies representing several dozen others at national level. They are spread all over the world and include tens of millions of members, who in turn are largely active volunteers within their fields and organizations. They are committed in all fields. They constitute the very fabric of civil society and their qualifications cover all UNESCO's own domains of competence.

Out of a total of 330, (some with multiple mandates),

- 126 are involved with education
- 89 are in the social and human sciences
- 68 are concerned with human rights, of which 12 are more specifically involved with children's rights
- 61 are in culture
- 55 are in communication
- 41 are involved in physical and natural sciences
- 54 work on youth issues
- 64 are involved in other fields (ecology, religion, employment, the handicapped...).

A Conference such as this one shows us clearly that only a third of our members are actively involved with us. That is well enough, but it is up to us to mobilize more.

Beyond these figures, impressive in and of themselves, and to move from the quantitative to the qualitative, it is probably the case that the original model of NGO-UNESCO relations can be better exploited, in terms of systematic participation of UNESCO sector representatives in our Joint Programmatic Commissions. The "focal points" representing sectors always respond positively when we invite them, but we need to turn to them more frequently. I intend in this respect to continue the excellent initiative of holding an annual working meeting between focal points and JPCs by holding a session this coming February.

Continuity also in the pursuit of a direct and constructive dialogue with Member States and in a first instance with the 23 members of the Executive Board NGO Committee, whom we will meet already in April. In this respect, I already have the assurance of His Excellency the Egyptian Minister Hany Helal, and his Chargé d'Affaires, Mr. El Zahaby, who have just honoured us by participating in our Monday morning session. As the new Chair of the Executive Board NGO Committee, Egypt already shows its willingness to

follow-up on the direction taken to open and strengthen cooperation between States and Civil Society begun by Mr. Lakatos.

Continuity yet again in an active partnership with the National Commissions, which, for their part, are an original and efficient group of partners for UNESCO. We turn firstly of course to the one closest to us, the French National Commission. I would like to thank its representative today, Mr Jean-Pierre Règnier, to have graciously accepted to join us for this closing session, and I would like to convey our own desire for partnership with them.

Continuity finally and above all in our loyalty to our own programme of work, defined by the Resolution we have just adopted, but already underway on many essential themes in our JPC s and Working Groups: Human Rights, Dialogue between Cultures, Poverty and Extreme Poverty, Science and Ethics, Youth; Education for Sustainable Development: Communication, Education for All, Microfinance, Culture of Peace. These working mechanisms have their own sustained programming from one year to the other, and we are proud of their dynamism. They often function as actual think tanks and we have been able to recognize yet again during this Conference that they are the bodies for intellectual cooperation that UNESCO needs. Nonetheless, it is up to us to further enhance the contribution they make.

But this Conference also reminded us during the Round Table on volunteerism on Tuesday, as many participant interventions illustrated, that the NGO contribution is not only one of thought, but also one of concrete action on the ground, the latter being the most committed and occasionally, the most dangerous. In fact, NGO action, the primary civil society actors, covers the widest spectrum, from the most concrete and committed action on the ground (the fields of water, environment, struggle against hunger, the fight for peace, etc.) to a purely intellectual contribution. We need to jointly remind ourselves to hold up both ends of the chain: from the grassroots to the think tank.

## **2. Renewal**

It will involve altogether content, method and organisation.

In terms of content, the major lesson drawn from this Conference seems to me to be that we have definitively placed ethics at the core of our concerns. I have had the opportunity to say in September 2008 during the DPI/NGO Conference for the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, that *Human Rights constitute the consistent goal of our action*. Well, we can add today that Ethics also ranks alongside it, that it is the corollary of this Declaration. We had already inscribed it in a central place in our approach to science, with the wealth of work undertaken by our JPC on Science and Ethics. Interestingly, the media have echoed this concern in recent days, regarding the increasingly close link between Ethics and Modern Science.

Saturday 28 November *Le Monde* informed us that a special prize with a gold medal had been attributed by MIT to the CRI, *Centre Français de Recherches Interdisciplinaires du vivant* “for its ethical and social approach” to the scientific problem of research on

synthetic biology, for its systematic integration of the ethical dimension in its research methodologies, thus demonstrating with the integration of the young sociologist, Sara Aguiton, 23 years old in the research team, that ethics is in an integral part of the scientific method and that it was an additional quality criteria for the overall research outcome.

Beyond Science and because of the crisis, it truly appears that Ethics is becoming an unavoidable dimension for the management and treatment of the major world problems. We will need to take them into account when we consider Ethics in Education, Ethics in Communication, and Ethics in Culture. In any case, this example shows us that we will need to reflect on the appropriate way to situate our own work within the new perspectives opened up by the crisis.

We shall also need to think about renewal in terms of method.

We will need to draw closer to the other intergovernmental “galaxies”, by which I mean the other major intergovernmental organizations (UN, Council of Europe, etc.) which hold partnerships with the NGOs. We would certainly have a great deal to learn by initiatives, and several of our members who already hold such ties would be able to advise us usefully.

In terms of method also, I am thinking that the International Conference of NGOs as such should renew its own existence and visibility by actions that could be made known on the outside, in its partnerships with UNESCO. It was suggested here Monday morning by Mr. Hans d’Orville that the NGOs might create and launch their own prize for ethics. Personally, I think that we could strengthen our own high-level intellectual contribution by organizing major NGO/UNESCO lectures. The idea deserves to be studied.

Finally, the renewal should take place in terms of organization.

By a better use of mapping NGOs and other UNESCO partners.

By a more specific division of tasks within the new Liaison Committee:

President/Vice President/Secretary-General/ Treasurer/

Councilors: Education/Sciences/SHS/Culture/Communication/

Web-master with an editorial team.

Finally, a decentralization policy should be put in place as foreseen by the ongoing United Nations reform, and we have already spoken about this direction during the Executive Board NGO Committee meeting in October 2008 based on a recent DG report and the *Cardoso Report* of 2004. The latter made proposals to the Secretary-General of the United Nations to better involve civil society in the Organization’s work in its reform framework and in response to globalization. We appreciated that it emphasized the need *to associate civil society organizations in the strategic planning, and not simply in the implementation phase*.

However, as the UNESCO DG pointed out in his report, these recommendations have had little follow-up. He said, in particular, and I quote: *“Another area where concrete action is lagging behind concerns the participation of civil society.... For its part, the Executive Board of UNESCO has strengthened the functioning of its NGO Committee, and a forum on civil society has been integrated into the work of the General Conference. It seems nonetheless that, in the context of the reform of the United Nations, at country level in particular, civil society and the NGOs are kept at a distance, ante portas. This situation must be remedied if only because of a concern for the credibility of the United Nations System.”*

To redress this situation, I refer again to my remarks in 2008 to ask that the principle announced under the encouraging title *“Delivery as One”* (=United in action) doesn't only apply to the organs and agencies of the United Nations, but also includes **effective** NGO participation and that of civil society in the “joint programming” exercises in pilot countries. Of course we are by definition international NGOs, but we all have members or direct partners at national level. With these members and partners, I would like to repeat here that we, the international NGOs, are ready to join a new initiative to strengthen collaboration of NGOs at national level: consultative group, liaison with the national coordinator, creation of a fund to finance this collaboration, creation of a database to facilitate contacts with the NGOs at local level, such as the project that has just been mentioned. These are perspectives for a decentralization that should be undertaken and pursued. The new website should be particularly helpful here.

### **3. Commitment**

Finally, the third principle that I cited to open up this mandate is one of commitment and mobilization. On this subject, I am certain to speak both for myself as well as for all the members of the new Liaison Committee as well as all of you.

This commitment will extend naturally to the major causes we hold dear, the first of which is Human Rights. Some say on occasion that this is not UNESCO's affair, and that it should be addressed in Geneva or New York. On the contrary, Human Rights are at the core of our action, our number one “construction site”, and I take up again the term of ‘general mobilization’ that I used during the DPI-NGO Conference in September 2008 by citing Robert Badinter's powerful words. Mobilization of all NGOs and not only those which are specialists on the subject. We have been able to do so here at UNESCO recently during the beautiful and joyous event around the Rights of the Child. We will continue to do so thanks to the determined action of our Human Rights JPC.

After this Conference which enabled us to think together about how we should address the world crisis, I am certain that we will know how to mobilize ourselves in shared action and the search for solutions at our level, but of course, with all the means at our disposal. We know that they are limited but growing, because they place us at the heart of a new political experience, that which consists of eventually finding new ways to create world governance, to work in favour of an emerging world democracy. The words appeared in our 2007 Resolution. They remain more than ever relevant today.

We should, as I already said elsewhere, fully play our role as activists and mobilizers during this crisis in order to open up new “spaces for democracy” to progressively nurture new modes of governance and new democratic processes: assemblies, open debates, coalitions, caucus, dissemination of key ideas, popular advocacy worldwide of individual solutions, etc.

This depends of course on our own ability to organize among ourselves, and to develop an effective and resolute civil society, that is truly representative of public well-being combining satisfaction of basic needs at individual level and conservation of planetary resources and both the richness and diversity of natural and public goods. I know that is a vast programme, one which we will not achieve in the short-term, but one that is the sole hope for the future.

Above all in this affair, we need to commit ourselves and act with the long term in view, by opposing the most common political stance that gives priority to the short-term and the next election, which is further conditioned by the world of communication and media’s culture of focusing on immediacy. But that we know how to do, as the study we began in 2008 on the history of NGO and UNESCO relations demonstrates. We shall be able to take this study further thanks to the new website under the heading of “Major Work in Progress”.

Here are a few directions for our work, dear friends, and several sound reasons to believe in the future. I am sure to be able to count on you for our shared work. As I thank you once, again, I extend my best wishes and to all, a safe journey.