

Apresentação do Relatório Anual do Painel das Nações Unidas sobre a relação entre a ONU e a Sociedade Civil

London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE)

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Dear friends,

I am very pleased with this opportunity to share with you the main messages and proposals of the Report on UN and Civil Social Relations presented last June to Secretary General Kofi Annan.

John Clark, the Panel's executive director, and Malini Mehra, one of our twelve Panel Members, will help me in this task.

The Panel was established with the mission to review the existing experience and develop practical proposals to improve UN's engagement with civil society and other non-state actors.

Our starting point was the realization that UN-civil society relationship had grown exponentially over the preceding decades. But, with progress, also came difficulties and tensions.

NGOs felt frustrated with the obstacles to substantive participation in policy-making and in the implementation of agreed programs.

Member States felt that civil society participation in decision-making was undermining the intergovernmental process.

It was essential to reduce distrust, demonstrate the effectiveness of collaboration and build consensus around new ways of working together.

In our process of consultation, we were guided by some basic assumptions:

- global governance is no longer the sole domain of governments;
- the growing participation and influence of non-state actors is enhancing democracy and reshaping multilateralism;
- civil society organisations are the prime movers of some of the most innovative initiatives to deal with emerging global threats.

Given how the world has changed, we challenged the UN also to undertake a profound "cultural change" - a paradigm shift.

To remain effective, the UN needs to reach out beyond its core membership of central governments and make full use of the capacities brought by a diversity of actors: NGOs, the private sector, parliamentarians, local authorities, the media.

We were aware that many member-States might react very strongly to any enlarged role to non-state actors.

We therefore acknowledged that, as an intergovernmental organisation, the power to decide in the UN would remain with the member-States.

But we also recognised that the power to shape the agenda, influence decisions, mobilise resources and ensure implementation is now open to all.

Our proposals affirmed four main principles:

- First is the need to reinterpret multilateralism to mean multi-constituencies. In the past, governments negotiated global agreements that UN agencies and member-States then implemented. Today, multiple alliances and networks bring together civil society, business and governments in joint initiatives of public debate, policy dialogue and pioneering action. Most of these strategic alliances were developed within the UN system itself. The Panel feels that these new forms of interaction are to be valued and extended. The UN should strengthen its convening role, its unique capacity to galvanise all constituencies and bring together different parties to tackle global problems;
- Second is the importance of multi-stakeholder partnerships. These flexible arrangements have emerged as effective ways of getting things done. They ensure that the resources of diverse actors are pooled together to deal with critical problems. The key message here is that all those with a stake in the problem should be included in the approach to solving it and in the implementation of the solution.
- Third is the challenge of linking the local level with the global. The deliberative and operational spheres of the UN work are separated by a wide gulf. This gap must be bridged. Operational programs at the national level must help realise the global goals and global deliberations must be informed by local reality. We are also recommending that priority should be put on interaction with civil society at the country level;
- Fourth is the need to overcome democratic deficits in global governance. The role of civil society and public opinion in creating a global public space for debate and action is at the heart of democratic governance. Citizens are increasingly using civil society channels to participate in the discussion of global issues. Public opinion influences international deliberations.

All these trends represent great opportunities for the UN. We are also suggesting a more systematic UN engagement of parliamentarians and local authorities. These non central-state actors cannot be considered as part of civil society. But they play a relevant role in connecting people and communities with the issues that affect them.

We see this opening up of the UN to a plurality of constituencies not as a threat to governments but rather as a powerful way to reinvigorate the intergovernmental process itself.

In this spirit, we have also addressed the sensitive question, often raised by governments, of civil society's legitimacy and accountability.

New roles and rights always entail new responsibilities. NGOs have to address these questions in the same way they have always urged governments and the private sector.

In our report we are challenging them to develop their own rules of conduct and processes of self-organization.

We reiterated the importance of understanding and respecting the source of civil society's legitimacy. It does not come from an electoral mandate or a membership base.

The legitimacy of civil society organizations derives from what they do, the causes they promote, and not from whom they represent.

We also accepted that civil society is not only diverse and multifaceted. It is also deeply divided on its political options.

All this makes the debate about civil society's legitimacy a very complex one. Trust and recognition in this field are never attained once and for all. They can only be gained in the arena of public opinion and must be continually renewed.

John will now summarize the Panel's recommendations that translate these principles into operational proposals.