

What is CoNGO and How to Become a Member

By

Teresa A. Hintzke

UN/CoNGO rep. NY, Geneva, Vienna

Vice President of CoNGO Board

The Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations (CoNGO) is an independent, international, non-profit association of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Since CoNGO was founded in 1948, it has relentlessly worked to ensure that NGO voices be heard throughout the international arena. It facilitates the participation of NGOs in United Nations debates and decision-making. CoNGO is most active at the major UN centers of New York, Geneva and Vienna but its work extends to all regions of the world. Providing NGOs with adequate access to UN meetings, conferences, special events, and documentation is a vital part of CoNGO's work. CoNGO's mission is to ensure the free exchange of ideas among all parties at the United Nations, by defending and upholding the rights of NGOs to voice their concerns (as defined in the UN Charter).

CoNGO's role in mobilizing NGOs to form the first worldwide NGO forum on human rights in 1968, its role in conceiving forms of NGO participation in UN world conferences and its advocacy on behalf of NGOs at UN Headquarters highlight CoNGO's chief objective 1: to ensure that NGOs be present when governments discuss issues of global concern at the United Nations. CoNGO does not take positions on substantive matters. However, CoNGO does provide, through special and

1

ad hoc NGO Committees, for a for discussion of substantive matters between its members and officials of the UN secretariat and UN system agencies, UN delegations and other experts.

NGOs with **full CoNGO membership** status include national, regional and international organizations in consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). **CoNGO associate** membership is open to NGOs associated with the UN system but not holding that consultative status.

Members represent a vast range of vital interests, in areas such as human rights, gender equality, peace and disarmament, social justice, racism, population, environment and sustainable development. CoNGO and its members collaborate with the larger community of NGOs through standing NGO committees, which follow issues that are of major interest relative to their

mandates and objectives of CoNGO:

The Conference of NGO's

- **ASSISTS** a wide variety of NGOs in consultative status in their efforts to promote their common aim of supporting the UN Charter, and to enhance their relationship and cooperation with the UN and its various organs; and
- **PROVIDES** a forum for NGOs with common interests to come together to study, plan, and act on issues relating to the principles and programs of the UN and its network of agencies.

2

Rules of the Conference of NGOs in Consultative Relationship with United Nations (CoNGO)

The Conference of NGOs in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations (CoNGO) is governed by its triennial General Assembly of representatives of all its members. The General Assembly elects an individual as President and 20 member organizations to serve as its Board. The Board acts between sessions of the General Assembly. It appoints from among its members a first Vice-President who serves in a personal capacity and is located in a region different from that of the President. The Board further appoints from among its members representatives from up to two organizations to serve as Vice-President, and two others as Secretary and Treasurer.

The Board usually meets in Geneva or New York but may meet elsewhere.

The Board and the General Assembly pursue the development of cooperation between NGOs and with the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and its subsidiary bodies.

CoNGO committees meet throughout the year at New York, Vienna and Geneva for the purpose of keeping their membership informed of developments in their respective fields and encouraging joint activities among organizations in support of UN programs. The UN supports activities of CoNGO by providing resources such as meeting facilities and services.

AIMS

The aims of the Conference are:

- a. –to ensure that NGOs in consultative status enjoy the fullest opportunities and are provided with all appropriate facilities for performing their consultative functions;
- b. – to foster cooperation and dialogue among all NGOs and with groupings of NGOs related to the UN system;
- c. – to provide a forum for the exchange of views on matters relating to the

consultative process, and on strengthening the relationship between NGOs and the United Nations, including the contributions which NGOs can make to promoting the principles, purposes, and effectiveness of the UN and its related agencies and programs;

- d. – to mobilize public opinion in support of the aims and principles of the United Nations, and to promote education about the UN with special emphasis on the contribution which NGOs make to its work.

3

MEMBERSHIP

Membership in the Conference is open to NGOs having consultative status with the United Nations through the Economic and Social Council, and which accept the aims set forth under rule 2 (henceforth in these rules referred to as “Members”).

Associate membership in the Conference is open to all NGOs having formal relationships but not consultative status with the United Nations ECOSOC - including NGOs affiliated with the Department of Public Information, NGOs accredited to United Nations Conferences, and NGOs accredited to treaty bodies – and which accept the aims set forth under rule #2. Associate Members shall not have the right to vote.

STRUCTURE

The Conference consists of:

- a. the General Assembly
- b. the Board
- c. the Officers
- d. Regional committees
- e. Committees on substantive issues

How to Achieve ECOSOC Consultative status

There are several detailed pages on the UN web that explain in detail the principles that are applied in order to establish consultative relations by an NGO organization. I give you only the first three principles in order to show what is needed::

1. The organization shall be concerned with matters falling within the purview of the Economic and Social Council and its subsidiary bodies.
2. The aims and purposes of the organization shall be in conformity with the spirit, purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations.
3. The organization shall undertake to support the work of the United Nations and to promote knowledge of its principles and activities, in accordance

with its own aims and purposes and the nature and scope of its competence and activities.

There are approximately 3000 NGO Organizations now holding consultative status. They enjoy certain privileges which allow them to place items on the agendas of ECOSOC and its subsidiary bodies; they may attend meetings where they may submit written statements and make oral presentations to governments.

The consultative relationship between the United Nations and non-governmental organizations, as reflected in ECOSOC Resolution 1996/31, serves as the principal avenue for channeling inputs from NGOs into ECOSOC's deliberations.

The UN Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations is a standing committee of ECOSOC. Its mandate is set out in ECOSOC Resolution 1996/31. The main tasks of the committee are:

1. Consideration of NGO applications for general consultative status and special consultative status, and of NGO requests for reclassification.
2. Consideration of reports submitted by NGO's holding general consultative status and special consultative status every fourth year;
3. Implementation of the provisions of Council resolution 1996/31 and the monitoring of the consultative relationship as well as other issues which ECOSOC may request the committee to consider.

Consultative status differs from other forms of association NGOs may have with entities of the UN Secretariat such as the Department of Public Information, designed to disseminate information about the UN, and the Non-Governmental Liaison Service, designed to disseminate information to and liaise directly with NGOs. Individual UN departments and agencies may establish their own rules governing their relations with NGOs and NGO committees. Information to assist in applying for consultative status as well as a complete list of NGOs in consultative status are available at the DESA/NGO Section website.

If you want to be active within the United Nations and be part of the CoNGO network, join us as a Full of Associate Member!

CoNGO membership is open to all national, regional and international NGOs that are involved with the United Nations.

- NGOs with consultative status with ECOSOC are eligible to become **Full members**, which includes the right to vote at the CoNGO General Assembly and stand for election to the Board. NGOs not having ECOSOC consultative status but having formal relations with the UN system can

become **Associate members**.

- CoNGO members are active participants in **42 CoNGO NGO committees** in New York, Geneva and Vienna, coordinating and promoting NGOs inputs and experiences concerning main issues and topics related to the UN agenda.
- CoNGO members participate in **Regional Civil Society For a and Conferences** organized by CoNGO.
- Our members regularly receive our **E-Update** with the latest news and information concerning upcoming events related to the UN and NGO community.