Growing the 'Third UN' for People-centered Development: The United Nations, Civil Society and Beyond by Roger A. Coate, 2008

The ACUNS 2008 John W. Holmes Memorial Lecture
Growing the 'Third UN' for People-centered Development: The United Nations, Civil Society and Beyond  Roger A. Coate

It is an honor to have the privilege to deliver the John Holmes Lecture to this year's annual ACUNS meeting. Three decades ago John Holmes argued, the need for having the kind of "international organizations in which to tackle the inescapably complex economic and social issues in an interdependent world need not be restated." Yet, 30 years later, the illusive quest continues for new avenues and directions for making global governance more effective for sustainable human development.

While this lecture is given in memory of John Holmes, it is dedicated to my good friend and most respected colleague, who is in the audience, Leon Gordenker. Leon, like John Holmes, was present so-to-speak at creation. He was present not only at the creation of ACUNS, but, more importantly, like Holmes, at the creation of the UN system. The wisdom and generous sharing of it by both of these scholar-practioners have given generations of students and colleagues unique and invaluable insights and understanding about international organization. I am delighted that he is with us today.

It was exactly 20 years ago that my friend and colleague, Don Puchala, and I presented the first "State of the United Nations Report" to the second meeting of this body.[1] In our extensive interviews with diplomats and UN officials and staff, we found an organizational system teetering and tottering on the verge of crisis. There was a void of leadership, a crisis of capacity precipitated largely by the refusal of the United States to fulfill its legal obligation to fund UN agencies, and staff moral was at an historic low. One of the main themes that we explored in that report was the challenge to the UN system-as intergovernmental institutions-of dealing with the plethora of global problems that confront the world and dominate the global agenda which cannot be solved by governmental or intergovernmental means alone. Reflecting back over the two decades since, it seems that in many ways the more things change in regard to world politics, the more they remain the same. Now, however, as we face the next several decades, the structure of world order is poised for transformation as rising Asian powers loom on the horizon and the revolution in information and communication technology continues to shrink social time and space. For well over a billion people though, who live on the edge of survival, such change is too long in coming and will not guarantee a significant betterment of their human condition. The need for global governance change is now.
Permit me to begin by relating to you exactly how I came to this topic—"Growing the 3rd UN for People-centered Development: The UN, Civil society and Beyond." First, I was fortunate to have had the opportunity to be a discussant several months ago on a panel at the annual meeting of the International Studies Association (ISA) where Tom Weiss presented a paper based on the *Global Governance* article by him and Richard Jolly and Tatiana Carayannis: "The ‘Third’ United Nations."[2] On the same panel was John Trent, who presented a paper based on his new book, *Modernizing the United Nations System: Civil Society's Role in Moving from International Relations to Global Governance*.[3] Both papers were quite excellent and set my mind churning.

Second, as you might be aware, I have recently concluded a series of nine "mid-term reports" on the millennium development goal (MDG) process for UNA-USA's *Interdependent*. The topic of sustainable human development—people-centered development—and frustrations with the slow progress toward attaining the MDGs have been much on my mind as has been the under-recognized contributions that Kofi Annan and other UN officials like Richard Jolly and his UNDP colleagues, and a long list of others have made to "making people matter" and enhancing the capacity of UN agencies to promote more effective sustainable human development and respect for human rights.

Third, I was greatly dismayed and disappointed by a recent *Global Governance* article that I felt had done disservice to the UN's work in promoting greater civil society and private sector involvement in global governance and wanted to respond in a constructive—albeit critical—way. I will return to this momentarily.

Finally, I asked my colleague Don Puchala, who had presented the Holmes lecture many years ago, for advice. His only response was: "do something that will be controversial and evoke response." So, in grand synthesis, I set out.

Then, last evening I listened attentively to Richard Jolly, and things became a bit clearer. I should go with the flow [so-to-speak] and focus more directly on the issues being addressed by others at the conference. In that context, I want to concentrate on a more organic reflection of role of the 3rd UN, its relationships with the other two UNs, and trends toward and changes that are needed to enhance the effectiveness of global public policies in dealing with the crucial social and economic problems.

This essay explores the current state of the debate over United Nations-civil society/private sector relations and why this relationship is critical to the future of the UN system and its success in dealing with the nexus of complex issues that crowd the global agenda. But one cannot understand the nature and implications of this debate without understanding its history and exploring the various assumptions, logic, world views and intellectual and practical biases which underpin the positions within it.

The UN in Holmesian Perspective
Thus, the story begins with John Holmes. In his article examining U.S.-UN relations from "A Non-American Perspective,"[4] Holmes argued that it was because the UN was founded on "permanent reality rather than legal fictions" that the system has survived and grown. Understanding the nature of the meanings of that "reality" and the inherent contradictions and tensions encompassed within them is critical for understanding the past and present as well as future possibilities of civil UN-civil society/private sector relations.

[Quoting Holmes] "the popular perception of the UN as a failed world government must be corrected. The problem, of course, always has been that the perfervid defenders and malevolent critics have the same misunderstanding. They are concerned with structure rather than with function. What might correct this misunderstanding is the involvement of far more people in the functions for which the UN system exists. Fishermen, air travelers, and the executives of multinational corporations cry out for international regulation, even though they may at the same time deplore interference. However much one would like to live by the less exhausting principles of international free enterprise, there is no escaping the need for some kind of management. The difference, however, between management that is regulatory and what might be called international administration has to be borne carefully in mind, in order not to frighten off the free enterprisers or bury the UN Secretariat under a load no international institution could sustain. More precise calculation and fewer general slogans are required in determining exactly what is advisable and possible to expect of the UN system... A better perspective is gained by starting from the agenda rather than by concerning oneself primarily with the preservation or improvement of the structure."

The United Nations, beginning from the 1942 alliance, represented a unique blend of real politic, liberal ideology, idealism, functionalism and war weariness. John Holmes understood this well. Again quoting Holmes:

"Roosevelt deliberately launched the UN with a conference dealing with the practical question of food. The United States was as much responsible as any country for seeing that agencies dealing with relief, international monetary and financial questions, and civil aviation were tackled before San Francisco. The UN in wartime had to be created in the abstract, but it was no Wilsonian philosopher’s dream. Then as now there were things to be done, and institutions were devised or improvised to cope with them."[6]

The UN that Holmes saw and that Don Puchala and I observed and reported on a decade later in that first ACUNS "State of the UN Report" was one that was being beaten, battered and abused by its largest member state. Like Holmes, who had made similar observations, we, as Americans, lamented this state of affairs and endeavored to present an analysis that might potentially influence things to the contrary; we failed. Twenty years later much has happened, yet too little has seemingly change in the first UN, despite the best efforts of devoted international public servants like Kofi Annan, Jim Grant, and Richard Jolly-to name but a few, and the Nobel laureates and other forces from the "Third UN."
Putting Things in Contemporary Perspective: The "Third UN"

Weiss, Jolly and Carayannis explore in their *Global Governance* article the intermingled and interdependent world of NGO-UN relations.[7] In doing so, they argue that there is a "third" United Nations. Building on Claude’s conceptualization of “two UNs”[8]- the intergovernmental bodies made up of member states and the secretariats comprised of international civil servants- they suggest that a "third UN" has evolved consisting of NGOs, academics, consultants, experts, and independent commissions. All three UNs, they suggest, coexist in symbiotic relationship. In order to understand UN politics, especially as related to institutional reform, all three UNs need to be considered holistically.[9] This essay endeavors to build on this conceptualization and explore this third United Nations and its potential for enhancing global public policy. In doing so, the focus will be on civil society and the private sector, excluding for this task the fifteen or so UN independent commissions on various topics.

Nongovernmental organizations and other civil society actors were present and active at creation [of the United Nations in San Francisco]. Today, some 3,000 NGOs have some form of consultative status in the UN system. Numerous scholars, including Alger, Gordenker and Weiss, and Ritchie among numerous others [several among us today], have presented succinct overviews of the evolution and nature of the roles of NGOs in the UN system, consisting of informal engagements as well as formal consultative status.[10] Civil society organizations are engaged in every aspect of global policy processes in the UN system, including agenda setting, advocacy, rule making, standard setting, promotion, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.[11] A problem is that there exists tremendous incoherence among this action set and ambiguity regarding the associated role of civil society in relation to the first two UNs.

In 2003, Secretary-General Annan appointed a distinguished blue-ribbon panel [part of the “Third UN”], chaired by former Brazilian president Fernando Cardoso, to examine the relationship between the UN system and civil society organizations in order to recommend ways in which UN agencies might better manage and enhance their relations with such organizations and facilitate the involvement of NGOs from developing countries in UN activities. The Report of the Panel of Eminent Persons on United Nations-Civil Society Relations (“Cardoso Report”) was issued in June 2004.[12] The final report reflected a series of politically negotiated observations-as might be expected-and offered a set of more than two-dozen recommendations for action. It was underpinned by four main principles-the UN needs to: 1) become an outward-looking organization; 2) embrace a plurality of constituencies; 3) connect the local with the global; and 4) help strengthen democracy for the twenty-first century. In brief summary, it recommended that UN agencies: invest more in civil-society partnerships; focus on engagement at the country level; strengthen the Security Council to broaden its engagement with civil society; engage with parliamentarians and other elected representatives; and initiate reforms to make accreditation and access by civil society organizations more easy.
Cardoso and company argued that "the most powerful case for reaching out beyond its constituency of central Governments and enhancing dialogue and cooperation with civil society is that doing so will make the United Nations more effective." In the language of the report, "Our starting paradigms also apply to the other panels and are the foundation for the continued relevance of the United Nations: (a) multilateralism no longer concerns Governments alone but is now multifaceted, involving many constituencies; the United Nations must develop new skills to service this new way of working; (b) it must become an outward-looking or network organization, catalysing the relationships needed to get strong results and not letting the traditions of its formal processes be barriers; (c) it must strengthen global governance by advocating universality, inclusion, participation and accountability at all levels; and (d) it must engage more systematically with world public opinion to become more responsive, to help shape public attitudes and to bolster support for multilateralism."[13]

At the core of the panel's recommendations was increasing investment in multilateral partnerships. "They must be viewed as 'partnerships to achieve global goals'...decentralized to relevant country and technical units and driven by needs, not funding opportunities. To advance this goal necessitates innovations and resources at both the country and global levels."[14] Accordingly, the panel recommended a number of institutional reforms aimed to facilitate and make more effective civil society-UN engagement. Unfortunately, by-and-large these recommendations were rather ambiguous and underspecified-reflecting undoubtedly the dynamics within the panel on this politically delicate issue.

**Willetts' Critique and Challenge**

While to many astute observers it may appear that the Cardoso Report is headed in a constructive direction, Peter Willetts has challenged that it was "poorly received by all significant political actors-by governments, NGOs, and the UN secretary-general.[15] He furthermore challenges that the report is intellectually incoherent and displays "little understanding of the existing NGO consultative arrangements."[16] In assessing the report and its recommendations, he argues that the panel's use of three normative arguments-functionalism, corporatism and pluralism leads to conclusion because they are incompatible with each other. Moreover, "[t]he first two approaches represent a threat to the NGO participation rights that have been operating for the last sixty years at the United Nations. The only morally sound and politically feasible basis for legitimizing wider NGO participation in the UN system is the democratic claim for all voices to be heard in the global policy debates."[17]

From this perspective, Willetts suggests that the report offered little new in way of enhancing UN-civil society engagement. While perhaps this might appear to be the case to the converted advocates of NGO involvement in UN decision-making processes, it clearly is not with regard to the First UN. Moreover, however, Willetts's thesis is not on target regarding the priority that he suggests be given to so-called democratic process over outcomes and attainment of organizational missions.
While there are important deficiencies in the Cardoso report, all is not a wasteland and the assumptions upon which the report is based are not irrelevant or any more incoherent than the assumptions underlying the international norms and institution forms on which the UN system is based. As reflected in John Holmes's observations, the UN from creation was designed to encompass all of the seemingly incoherencies and incompatibilities identified by Willetts’ functionalism, corporatism and liberal democratic ideals. The UN system was, by design, to create a dynamic synthesis between the Westphalian interstate political legal order and the capitalist world economy both to be tempered by liberal ideology. Unfortunately for Willetts's thesis, ignoring such foundations or trying to wish them away is not a proper approach for understanding the contemporary situation or discussing future directions for promoting sustainable human development.

**Civil Society, Private Sector and the UN**

In this context, an aim of the remainder of this essay is to reexamine the nature, evolution, and extent of civil society and private sector involvement in the UN system as it relates to enhancing or diminishing the effectiveness of UN agencies in dealing with complex global issues. What is the value added by bringing civil society and other non-state actors more fully into global policy processes? What are the costs and limitations and are they worth it?

Regarding the role of civil society in the UN, affairs are not as straightforward as Willetts might like us to believe. Again paraphrasing John Holmes writing over three decades ago,

[NGO] “purists are somewhat unhappy...Concepts must be adjusted to recognize the values of the galaxy” [of inescapably complex economic and social issues in our interdependent world]... International life is managed to a very large extent by private international bodies-grain exchanges and money exchanges, giant regulatory organizations, and corporations with resources far beyond that of the whole UN budget. What is needed is to incorporate a consciousness of these networks into the designs for world order rather than capture them for international administration that is simply not mature enough to cope-and possibly never will be.”

This, I believe, is the essence of what Agenda 21 is all about, with its focus on including the ten major groups. A crucial question for us to confront thirty years later as we move forward in the twenty-first century is international administration now mature enough to more fully engage these crucial elements of world society? If not, what reforms are needed to create such an enabling environment?

**What has UN practice taught us over the past decades?**

The work of Chadwick Alger has been enlightening in this regard, especially his analyses of NGOs and people's movements as, what he terms, “tools for peacebuilding” in the UN.[18] Building on the work of Alger, there are at
least four mechanisms [or additional "peacebuilding tools"] through which the UN and civil society have become engaged that influence global policy processes. These mechanisms are: networking and coalition building; global campaigns; parallel conferencing; and partnerships.[19] They serve to facilitate in varying ways stages of global policy process—information/problem identification, issue framing, agenda setting, decisionmaking, monitoring, evaluation and feedback. Civil society actors are actively engaged in each functional area and make contributions that are unique to an otherwise intergovernmental process, engaging in advocacy and lobbying, promotion, information creation and dissemination, research/policy analysis and evaluation, rule making/standard setting, and monitoring.

NGOs participation in consultative status with ECOSOC, for example, has grown from 40 in 1948, 180 in 1968, 1505 in 1998 and 3187 in 2008. Overwhelmingly the growth has been in "special" category NGOs. In 2008 two-thirds of consultative-status NGOs (2062) was "special" status organizations. Most of the rest were "roster" NGOs, and only 138 classified as "general," The UN Department of Public Information (DPI) currently has 1,697 NGOs associated with it. At the same time, the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) coordinates its engagement with civil society and the private sector via the major groups mechanism. Of the 2,147 organizations active in the CSD process in 2008, over half (1,287) were classified as NGOs.

The Department of Economic and Social Affairs facilitates engagement with NGOs through its integrated Civil Society Organizations (ICSO) System. Coordination of UN-civil society relations is exceedingly demanding. The primary designated "focal points for NGOs" include: Department of Disarmament Affairs (DDA); Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA); Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR); Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA); and Department of Political Affairs (DPA). DESA's NGO purview covers: ECOSOC; Financing for Development Office (FfD); Division for Social Policy and Development; and Division for Sustainable Development. In addition, there are at least eighteen other agencies and programs that serve as important focal points for civil society engagement. One dominant aspect of such engagement is the formation of alliances and cooperation with interorganizational networks.

**Networking and Coalition Building**

Ruggie has succinctly summarized and underscored the importance of networking and networks in global governance policy processes.[20] Networking and coalition building are inherent in umbrella INGOs like IUCN, ICSU and ISSC. In essence, umbrella INGOs are coalitions of NGOs that network among themselves. The IUCN, for example, represents a network of over 1,000 organizations and 10,000 experts from around the world.[21] Other leading NGO networks actively and effectively involved in UN policy processes include: Jubilee 2000, Climate Change Action Network, International Action Network on Small Arms, Coalition for the International Criminal Court, the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent
Societies. When viewed in the larger context of global governance, networks and coalitions serve as linchpins, bridging organizations and clearinghouse for information. They promote solidarity and capacity building and serve as advocates of policies and programs and harmonization.[22]

While most NGO networks grow up outside the UN, sometimes NGO networks are spawned as a result of institutional change in the UN system. In 1973, for example, as a result of the creation of the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) in Nairobi, a World Assembly of NGOs Concerned with the Global Environment was held and out of the gathering emerged the Environment Liaison Centre-International (ELC). The ELC represented a coalition of over 500 member organizations that linked over 6,000 NGOs from around the world. Regardless of their origins, these networks help to facilitate the operational work of the Second UN as well as to serve to support various functions of the First UN-information, normative, rule-creating, and rule-supervising functions.

Today, nongovernmental networks and coalitions are active in every substantive area of the UN's work. In regard to child rights, for example, ten child rights organizations and networks work together in the Global Movement for Children. UNICEF, CARE, Oxfam, NetAids, Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), Environmental Development Action in the third World (ENDA), Latin American and Caribbean Network for Children (REDLAMYC), Plan International, Save the Children, and World Vision, plus the Alliance of Youth CEOs embrace the broad mission of building a world fit for children. The Child Rights Information Network (CRIN) is one of the larger global networks. It is comprised of more than 2,000 organizations-85 percent of which are NGOs-in 150 countries. Its primary focus is on promoting information and action on children's rights. It is supported by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), Save the Children Sweden, UNICEF, Save the Children UK, Plan International, World Vision International and the Westminster Foundation for Democracy.

The first UN (General Assembly) also has come to recognize the importance of engaging such networks. The 2001 UN General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) on AIDS, for example, launched an ongoing process for engaging civil society in facilitating the UN's implementation of the UNGASS Declaration of Commitment (DoC) on HIV/AIDS. In preparation for the 2006 five-year review of UNGASS and again in 2008, a Civil Society Coalition on HIV/AIDS UNGASS was formed to strengthen civil society participation in the reviewing progress and promoting accountability and transparency of the review process. Twelve representatives for stakeholder groups were asked to participate on the task force. These groups included: networks of people living with AIDS; networks of other key populations (drug users, sex workers, men who have sex with men); UNAIDS Programme Coordinating Board (PCB); labour organizations; women's organizations; youth networks; faith-based organizations; private sector; and civil society AIDS support organizations (ASOs). Individuals selected were drawn from a pool of three nominees submitted by each stakeholder group.
Global Campaigns

Another mechanism used both by international agencies to accomplish their objectives and by civil society organizations to influence global policy processes, especially as related to normative and rule creation functions of international organizations and promoting peace and social justice, is the formation of global campaigns.[23] For example, the International Action Network on small Arms (IANSA), Amnesty International and Oxfam, joined together in October 2003 to launch the Control Arms Campaign.[24] The campaign has been working aggressively for a global arms trade treaty. Another global NGO campaign that enjoyed much success was the Baby Food Safety Campaign, spearheaded by the International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN). IBFAN joined together the International Organization of Consumers Unions (ICU), the Inter-Faith Center on Corporate Responsibility, and the Infant Formula Action Coalition (INFAT). The campaign was successful in getting the World Health Organization to approve a set of recommended standards for marketing infant formula. Other instructive examples include: the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL), which was initiated by the international red cross (ICRC) and grew into a huge global network of over 1,000 groups from over sixty countries; the Global Campaign for Education, for example, is an alliance among NGOs, government aid agencies, teachers' and public sector unions and child rights activists from 180 countries to promote free, quality basic education for all; and the campaign against the Multilateral Agreement on Investment, which demonstrated how diverse nonstate actors used the world-wide web in their attempt to scuttle the agreement.[25]

In analyzing global campaigns, Josselin and Wallace conclude: “[T]ogether with international conferences and summits, such campaigns are contributing to the emergence of common norms and values.”[26] It is to such international conferencing that we now turn.

Parallel Conferencing

Beginning in the early 1970s, NGOs developed the practice of holding separate “parallel” conferences at the same time and in the general same location as UN conferences. One of the earliest such parallel conferences was held in conjunction with the UN Conference on the Human Environment (UNCHE) in Stockholm in 1972. Although the UNCHE Secretariat was proactive in involving scientific NGOs in conference planning as discussed above, other NGOs found it difficult to break through the Westphalian wall that surrounded the official conference. Thus they initiated their own conference activities in parallel. Similar events were planned and hosted in conjunction with many, if not most, major UN-sponsored conferences in the years to come. The UNCED conference perhaps represents the apex of such activities.[27]
As UN conferencing grew and evolved, NGO conferences and parallel conferences became a permanent fixture on the multilateral scene. Conference after conference, issue upon issue, transnational NGOs, acting in concert, carved out a political space of their own in attempting to influence norm and rule creating activities on international organization. The Westphalian order that characterized the UN system was under siege. Civic-based actors were not only knocking at the door and requesting a seat at the table, they were building their own chairs and tables and developing their own rules of the game. Parallel conferencing provide a venue that member state governments could constrain but not control.[28]

In more recent years, NGOs have been increasingly able to “occupy seats at the table” in the official conferences themselves. This was illustrated at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development: “The summit reflected a new approach to conferencing and to sustainable development more generally. It was a dialogue among major stakeholders from governments, civil society, and the private sector. Instead of concentrating primarily on the production of treaties and other outcome documents, participants focused on the creation of new partnerships to bring additional resources to bear for sustainable development initiatives.”[29] The WSIS possessed a similar venue with civil society organizations participating in the actual conference deliberations.

**Partnerships**

The new “growth industry” with respect to UN-civil society and private sector engagement is partnership creation and promotion. Such an approach was inherent in the wake of UNCED. The conference outcome document and plan of action, Agenda 21, specifically called for the integration ten major groups-NGOs, indigenous peoples, local governments, workers, businesses, scientific communities, farmers, women, children, and youth-in the work of the newly created Commission on Stainable Development. In the context of this mandate, ECOSOC authorized the CSD to bring all 1,400 NGOs represented at the conference into consultative status with the new body. Thus, integrating “major groups” within civil society into decisionmaking was explicitly embedded in CSD's mandate. In terms of UN jargon, the CSD currently has over 340 “voluntary multi-stakeholder partnerships.”[30]

In the context of the entire UN system, however, this represents just the tip of a very large iceberg. The UNDP, World Bank and nearly every other operational agency have evolved elaborate systems of partnerships with NGOs and other diverse elements of civil society. In its 1999 annual report, for example, the World Bank reported that 50 percent of its approved projects were run through NGOs.[31] The Bank argues that such extensive reliance on partnerships makes perfect sense, since NGOs have a comparative advantage in getting the product to the poor.[32] A leading catch phrase of the era has become “multistakeholder” arrangements/partnerships, as evidenced, for example, in the UN-initiated Global Reporting Initiative, Forest Stewardship Council and Global Alliance of Vaccines and Immunization.
As evidenced in Willetts' stinging critique, the most controversial aspects of such partnership creation has been public-private partnerships and, most especially, the Global Compact initiated by Secretary-General Kofi Annan. Unfortunately, all-too-often, the critique of the Global Compact is conducted on an abstract level and related to issues of civil-society representation in regard to UN delegate bodies and not focused on the implications for the effectiveness of UN agencies in fulfilling mandates and dealing with critical global problems. Viewing public-private partnerships in more concrete terms, I propose, yields a different perspective.

The UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), for example, partners with the private sector in dealing with humanitarian disasters. The private sector is viewed as being particularly helpful for: mobilizing resources rapidly; contributing to relief efforts in sectors that are under-resourced, such as agriculture education, health care and sanitation; providing technical expertise; and assisting with logistics, communication and warehousing of goods and equipment. The agency has worked with the International Business Leaders Forum to produce and disseminate a framework for business response for management and planning of natural disasters.

Administratively, the UN Office for Partnerships (UNOP) facilitates UN relations with the private sector and private foundations. UNOP oversees the UN Fund for International Partnerships (UNFIP, established in 1998), the UN Democracy Fund (UNDEF, created in 2005), and Partnership Advisory Services and Outreach. Of these, UNFIP is the most notable, as it serves as an autonomous trust fund manages UN Foundation relations with UN agencies. As of August 2008, the UNFIP-UN Foundation partnership had yielded over an additional $1 billion in real resources for over 400 UN-agency projects in 123 countries. UNDEF in 2007 funded 125 projects for a total of $35 million. Over half of the funding went to initiatives on civic education, electoral support and political parties and promoting democratic dialogue and constitutional processes. Another third focused on civil society empowerment and projects for promoting accountability, transparency and integrity.[33]

Focusing more concretely on the UN's Global Compact with business reveals some interesting programmatic initiatives.[34] For the purposes of this lecture, three examples will suffice. The Global Compact's least developed country initiative, which is coordinated by UNDP, works to attract private investment for sustainable development and identify opportunities for local small and medium-sized enterprises in resource-poor countries. The Global Compact has also launched an initiative on Business in Zones of Conflict. It is designed to provide guidance to the private sector regarding roles that businesses can play in preventing and resolving conflict. The Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal is associated with the Global Compact through the UN Environmental Programme (UNEP). In the context of the Global Compact, the Conference of the Parties to the Basel Convention established in 2002 a very elaborate and formal public-private partnership program. It is designed to provide governments and stakeholders with more effective means to collectively address
and manage waste streams by tapping expertise and knowledge and leveraging scarce resources beyond that normally available to government bodies, especially at sub-national levels. Partnership activities include: training; information collection and dissemination; development and utilization of practical tools; and capacity building. This multi-stakeholder arrangement encompasses actors from industry and business, international institutions, environmental and other nongovernmental organizations, academia, and government at all levels. Examples of recent initiatives include partnerships on: trans-boundary movements of used and end-of-life cell phones (Mobile Phone Partnership Initiative); used and end-of-life computing equipment; household wastes mixed with hazardous waste; and lead, cadmium, mercury and asbestos.

Neither strictly civil society nor private sector, another evolving partnership with UN agencies is that of parliamentarians. The UN’s engagement with parliamentary bodies has been occurring for nearly two decades, and was solidified in 2008 by the first Conference of Presiding Officers of National Parliaments that was held at UN headquarters in conjunction with the Millennium Summit. The Millennium Declaration, issued by the summit, called for the UN to work with national parliaments, through the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), in pursuit of its mandates. The IPU, which is comprised of members from 146 parliaments and seven regional assemblies, was granted formal observer status by the General Assembly in November 2002. Again in 2005, the Second World conference of Speakers of Parliament met in New York in conjunction with the 2005 World Summit. Summit leaders renewed their call for strengthened cooperation with the IPU and national and regional parliaments. Every year in conjunction with the annual session of the General assembly, the IPU organizes a Parliamentary hearing to facilitate interaction and exchange between parliamentarians and UN officials and member-state delegations. In Rome in November 2006, the UN and IPU opened the office for the Global Centre for Information and Communication Technology in Parliament. The aim of the center is to modernize parliamentary processes and foster inter-parliamentary cooperation via information and communication technology. It is a cooperative endeavor of not only the UN but also the Governments of Italy and the Netherlands, the Chamber of Deputies of Italy, and the European Parliament.

UN agency-IPU relations span a wide range of issue areas, including: human rights (OHCHR-IPU); status of women (UN Division for the Advancement of Women (UNDAW-IPU); children and youth (UNICEF-IPU); sustainable development trade (WTO-IPU); HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS-IPU); and democracy and good governance (UNDP-IPU). The IPU worked for national ratifications of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and has worked with UNICEF on publications dealing with violence against children and child trafficking

The Cardoso Report Reconsidered

Reflecting on Willetts’ critique presented above that the Cardoso Report is intellectually incoherent and displays little understanding of the existing NGO consultative arrangements, it seems a bit harsh to expect a much more coherent analysis and set of recommendations regarding what is largely a very complex and incoherent phenomenon. Civil
society participation in policymaking contains significant aspects of functionalism: UN agencies need and desire NGO expertise. In an environment of declined donor state commitment to providing adequate development financing, new and innovative alternatives are needed in order to make sustainable development a reality. In order to solve in any way that is sustainable the kinds of complex social and economic problems, which dominate UN agencies’ agendas, those most affected need to be involved in the process. Finally, the UN system is committed to enhancing democratic policymaking and engaging NGOs in every aspect of the policy process is one way of doing so. The problem is how to reform the UN system in order to accomplish all the above without placing an impossible set of burdens on international civil servants.

The panel offered a number of institutional reform recommendations, which were unfortunately left underdeveloped, especially in regard to their implications for established NGO consultative mechanisms and arrangements, making them easy targets of criticism. It is important to keep in mind, however, that the Cardoso panel is but one of the many attempts to think through the question of UN-civil society relations systematically. In 1999, for example, the Global Development Network (GDN), sponsored by the World Bank of other international institutions, brought together over 500 economic policy think tanks to explore ways to improve such entities capacities for promoting economic development.[35] Participants at this meeting addressed the issue of how UN agencies might best work with, make best use of the potential contributions of and coordinate and channel relations with the plethora NGOS that wish to influence and participate in UN policymaking and activities. They proposed that the transnational research community serve as a “quality check system ...vetting NGOs and their worthiness for interaction with the UN.”[36] The group concluded that think tanks could play several main roles in this regard: communicate and translate global values and agreements to regional and local audiences; review international agreements and recommend the formulation of national and regional policy options; convene and build alliances among NGOs and civil society; and train and teach fledgling NGOs on organizational management, planning and advocacy.[37]

In the final analysis, it seems that the issue of the democratic deficit in the United Nations and global governance is for many, like Willetts, the core issue. This is inherent in Willetts’ complaint that NGOs have no formal status in the main organs of the UN other than ECOSOC and have no formal status with the Bretton Woods institutions.[38] But who do NGOs, especially those that operate at the global level and make their presence felt in New York, Geneva and Washington, represent? Wapner has inferred that on balance NGOs may be no less accountable to their constituencies than are most national governments or transnational corporations.[39] Yet, it seems important to always keep in mind that NGOs are interest groups underpinned with particular values and interests that they seek to promote. While some may claim to operate in the best collective interests of all humankind, why should other actors automatically assume any degree of legitimacy in such claims? The Quaker Office at the United Nations, for example, has worked hard in promoting norms against child soldiers, weapons proliferation, and violations of human rights. So who or what is the foundation for its legitimacy and from where does its authority to act emanate? The answer, of
course, is the set of values and normative convictions upon which it operates. Yet, in a multicultural world is that enough?

The increasing use of collaborative networks has raised accountability issues. Ruggie addresses this issue in two parts: “accountable for what?” and “accountable to whom?” In terms of the “for what” criteria, Ruggie argues that networks are not normally rule-based and can only be managed for results.[40] In regard to accountable to whom, he offers that participants in multi-stakeholder partnerships may not be strictly speaking accountable to anyone but themselves. “For example, some NGOs are large membership organizations with transparent governance structures and funding sources, but many others are not.

To what extent does a focus on integrating NGOs into global governance represent cultural bias toward Western liberal ideology? For example, in their edited volume on the role of donor funding of civil society organizations for democratic promotion, Ottaway and Carothers and their colleagues raise serious questions about the impacts of such practices. They go as far as to suggest that such external civil society aid may actually undermine the legitimacy of the organizations the donors are trying to promote because “the kinds of NGOs that donors most often select to support are generally not organizations representing a genuine constituency....”[41] These NGOs can only speak “on behalf of” but not “for” the constituencies they claim to represent. Moreover, the case studies in this volume illustrate how, especially in the Islamic world and Africa, those types of civil society groups that are most influential in society-professional associations, ethnic and religious groups— are systematically by passed by major donors (especially the United States).[42] “The organizations ... [that donor funding] helps call into being and develop are the creations of donor funding rather than of social demands for representation and a role in policy-making”[43]

So, in this sober light, what is the answer to the question—what is the value added by bringing civil society, the private sector and other elements of world society more fully into global policy processes? Well, the answer may or may not be increased democratization of global governance processes, but it is clearly the enhancement of global policy processes in terms of increasing IOs’ capacities and competence for fulfilling critically important information, normative, rule-creating, rule-supervising and operational functions. NGOs, other civil society organizations, sub-national governance institutions and the private sector indeed provide much needed value added but also represent good value for the money in coping with the plethora problems confronting humankind in the early 21st century.

Each of the categories of “constituencies,” as the Cardoso report puts it, brings with it disadvantages as well as advantages, constraints as well as capabilities, and costs as well as benefits. As the World Commission on Global Governance cautioned, engaging with a more diverse range of civil society actors means that international civil servants and governments alike are forced to deal with a broader range of interests and operating styles. This, I believe, is more of a virtue than a cost. It reflects more closely the complex world in which international programs, projects and policies must be carried out.
But still, strong voices ask: why include the private sector? Of course there are numerous arguments for both excluding and including the private sector in our discussion of UN-civil society partnerships [despite the fact that we may not want technically to include it in the definition of civil society]. In the short time remaining, three will be explored briefly. The first is the Global Compact rationalization offered by former Secretary-General Kofi Annan. In essence, the aim of this program is to garner wider support for the protection of international norms and standards by bringing international business “inside.” The globalizing world of market expansion has led to a growing imbalance in the ability to enforce various kinds of international norms. While substantial progress has been made in globalizing and integrating free-trade and other liberal economic norms into domestic settings, much less movement has occurred in the area of promoting social norms related to such economic processes, such as human rights, labor standards, and protecting the environment.[44] In order to help redress such an imbalance, Annan proposed a partnership involving the private sector, NGOs and international agencies—the “global compact.” In this compact, corporations were asked to embrace and support nine international principles, drawn from UN human rights, labor, and environmental legal instruments, and accordingly to embrace related “good practices.”

Finally, as John Holmes reminded us many years ago, much if not most of the real governance in the world though which values become authoritatively allocated is in reality done by private sector institutions and entities. This is part and parcel of the grand compromise/synthesis upon which the post-World War II world order has been based—the liberal melding of the Westphalian-interstate order with the capitalist world economy. The UN system was from inception an amalgamation of these two perceived disparate systems. While the international institutions established were to be based on states and the unit of membership [with all the legal fictions that accompany the concept], the allocation of values within the world politic was to be largely managed by the “invisible hand” of private-sector operations, over which the governments of states should place minimalist constraints. Liberal democracy called for civil and political equality as a fundamental principle, while at the same time liberal economics, which serves as de facto political allocator enshrine inequality as guiding principle.

Albeit, the global compact was a grand scheme, but ill-conceived it was not. Its creators understood well the nature of the complex interdependent and holistic organic world in which the UN operates. Empowering people for sustainable human security requires providing sustainable livelihoods. It requires empowerment. Empowering people with ideas without providing them with political economic empowerment is a path to conflict, not cooperation. Human rights and democratic ideals are hollow without social and economic security. Is freedom to be constantly hungry, to be malnourished, to live in abject poverty, to live without safe drinking water or adequate sanitation, or to allow all the above to be determined by the invisible hand of supply and demand really freedom? By continuing to operate in a schizophrenic manner that endeavors to promote better governance while at the same time ignoring and excluding from engagement those kinds of forces, as suggested by John Holmes, that impact most on global, transnational and national allocation processes seems to some foolhardy. Inclusion of NGOs and other elements of traditionally conceived civil society is not enough. In the words of the Cardoso panel report, “Civil society is now so vital to the
United Nations that engaging with it well is a necessity, not an option. It must also engage with others, including the private sector, parliaments and local authorities.”[45]

In conclusion, as Holmes suggested, effective multilateral diplomacy requires something like “synchronized diplomacy.” In a globalizing, highly complex interdependent world successful global policy requires that all the instruments and performers necessary for producing harmonious outcomes be engaged constructively in the symphony.

________________________

Roger Coate is Paul D. Coverdell Chair of Public Policy at Georgia College and State University and He is author or co-author of numerous books, including most recently: United Nations Politics: Responding to a Challenging World and The United Nations and Changing World Politics, Fifth Edition. He is also co-founding editor of Global Governance.


[9] Ibid.; Trent makes a similar argument in Modernizing the United Nations System.


[14] Ibid., pp. 9-10.


[16] Ibid., p. 305.

[17] Ibid., p. 306.


[22] Weiss and Gordenker, *NGOs, the UN, and Global Governance*, p. 367.


[28] Roger Coate, "Civil Society as a Force for Peace."

[29] Ibid.


[33] "Enhanced cooperation between the United Nations and all relevant partners, in particular the private sector," Report by the Secretary-General, New York, United Nations, August 18, 2003; http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N03/461/70/PDF/N0346170.pdf?OpenElement


[36] Ibid., p. 124.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Peter Willetts, "The Cardoso Report on the UN and Civil Society: Functionalism, Global Corporatism, or Global Democracy?" Global Governance 12, no. 3 (July-September 2006): 305.


[42] Ibid.
