

**International Civil Society Forum
The Future We Need: Civil Society Democratizing the United Nations
Sao Paulo, BRAZIL
March 11-12, 2013**

On March 11 and 12 2013 in Sao Paulo, Brazil, FIM-Forum for Democratic Global Governance (FIM) will convene an international Forum to take stock of civil society (CS) United Nations (UN) relations. Invited participants will include experienced civil society leaders from across all major sectors as well as new thinkers and new leaders from global and regional movements. This Forum will facilitate a global conversation designed to include new voices and new perspectives. Discussions will be informed by specific case examples of civil society engagement with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and post 2015 process, and with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Case analyses will focus on how civil society can, within our complex and shifting global reality, achieve meaningful, regular and inclusive global civil society participation within UN processes. The Forum will examine new and emerging ideas on governance and the implications of these alternatives to structured CS-UN relations and to democratization of global governance.

Participant activities will: identify lessons learned and strategies for advancing CS-UN relations and processes, contribute to the understanding of new forces and debates that are shaping global governance, and envision the roles and responsibilities of civil society in shaping CS-UN relations and the future we need.

Since 1998, FIM has worked to capture and disseminate the knowledge and experience of civil society practitioners working to influence the policies and practices of the United Nations and multilateral system. FIM's work is premised upon the conviction that democratized multilateralism is a necessary condition for attaining democratic global governance. FIM has a unique and growing body of lessons learned, strategies and principles for CS engagement with the multilateral system that are grounded in CS practitioner knowledge and experience. The Sao Paulo Forum will extend this tradition of mobilizing civil society practitioner knowledge, providing a venue for sharing local examples and global perspectives on civil society relations with the United Nations and the future we need.

The 1990s and early 2000s signified a turning point for civil society relations with the United Nations. This was due largely to the unprecedented and effective large scale inclusion of civil society organizations at UN World Conferences. Civil society came of age as global governance actors, as they integrated their activism with official UN processes. Many UN conventions and programmes owe their existence to initiatives launched or carried forward by experienced NGOs and CSOs and many landmark accomplishments resulted from these new UN-CS relationships.¹ These CS-UN relations have resulted in significant progress for humanity. Indeed, the United Nations, through these initiatives, has played a critical role in building civil society capacity to influence global governance.

There is little doubt as to the importance and value of civil society in advancing the UN mandate as outlined in the UN Charter. The 2004 Cardoso Report *We the Peoples: Civil Society, the United Nations and Global Governance* confirmed that much had been achieved in bringing civil society inputs to UN operations and deliberations. Civil society was described as invaluable and a natural UN ally. The Report stressed that UN-CS engagement was vital and should be protected, expanded and deepened. Many practical suggestions for strengthening UN-CS relationships were included in the Cardoso Report and, then Secretary General Kofi Annan urged governments to act on them. Despite this strong call, and obvious need for increased civil society participation in UN processes, the general consensus following the Cardoso Report was that

¹ FIM has featured some of these achievements of CS-UN relations in its international Forums, drawing from them lessons, strategies and principles for good practise; e.g.: establishment of follow up mechanisms such as Social Watch, the NGO Steering Committee to the UN Commission on Sustainable Development, the development of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the International Convention to Ban Antipersonnel Land Mines, International Criminal Court.

governments did not take action to implement its recommendations. UN-CS relationships have remained sporadic to this day, falling far short of achieving a state of meaningful, regular involvement by civil society.

Civil society-United Nations relations have also been affected over the past decade as civil society turned its attention away from the United Nations to focus on a growing diversity of forces affecting governance. These forces include the policies and decisions of powerful transnational corporations and multilateral actors including the G20, the WTO and BRICS. Decisions and policies of these global actors are having profound impacts on the environment, human rights and all sustainable development agendas. New ideas on development and new debates will increasingly inform and shape the global discourse as citizens increasingly participate in their own governance. Leaderless people's movements and revolutions, notably "Occupy" and "Arab Spring" and the growing power and use of the internet and new social media signify this irreversible phenomenon.

We are witnessing a global paradigm shift towards a world view that includes participatory democracy. These forces and shifts are having profound effects on the traditional, representative, definitions of democratic governance, including democratic global governance. At the same time, we are witnessing the legitimacy, credibility and even the relevance of the United Nations questioned. The underlying foundations of the UN are being challenged.

Yet, the United Nations remains the only multilateral governance body on earth with a global mandate for humanity. It is FIM's belief that the United Nations, with its commitment to equality and justice and championing of development agendas, is a key to achieving the sustainable and just future we all surely need. Yet, a democratized United Nations is far from a reality. The vast source of civil society knowledge and experience from in the field and on the ground remains largely unknown and inaccessible to UN decision-making processes.

Indeed, embedded in civil society's multifaceted foci and activities is the vision of the citizens of the world participating fully in their own governance from local levels to the global. In the aftermath of the Rio+20 conference and leading into the "Post-2015" era of Sustainable Development Goals, there is an urgent need to address the democratic deficit that exists within UN bodies and the multilateral system and global governance in general.

Following broad consultation within the FIM network, the FIM Board of Directors has selected examination of CS-UN relations in the context of the MDGs and the IMF to provide a foundation for discussion. The MDGs, and related post-2015 development agendas, are critical areas for establishment of effective, sustained CS-UN relations. Case examples to be presented at the Forum will feature CS efforts to mobilize practitioner experience and knowledge of MDG processes that work at the country level. Invited participants who are engaged in MDG, and post 2015, processes will contribute to analysis of the global status of CS-UN relations in regards both to the achievement of the MDGs and to legitimate CS participation in the post 2015 discourse and ongoing UN processes.

The IMF is a highly complex and specialized UN body. It is also a key area of concern for CS-UN relations and for achieving global development agendas. Global financial flows are, and will continue to be, intricately tied to determining the likelihood of achieving development agendas presently, and post 2015. In the past decade the IMF has gained greater power and authority as its focus shifted dramatically from engagement in southern economies to a global mandate that includes Europe and North America. Northern and southern-based civil societies are increasingly focused on influencing the decisions and policies of this global financial institution. Case examples from civil society initiatives to influence the IMF will highlight lessons and strategies for successful CS-UN relations.

The FIM Secretariat October 29, 2012
See www.fimforum.org for further information.