

GCAP 2007
Stand up and speak out:
12.30pm Hall 2



CIVICUS World Assembly, Glasgow, May 23-27, 2007

TERRAVIVA

This newspaper is the product of a partnership between Inter Press Service, CIVICUS and SCVO

MAY 24, 2007 1

Chant for Accountability

► By Brendan O'Brien and Zarina Geloo

Civil society has to be more accountable. This is the key message of the 2007 CIVICUS World Assembly to the more than 1000 delegates from about 140 countries who have arrived at Glasgow's Scottish Exhibition and Conference Centre.

Martin Sime, chief executive of the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations who spoke at the opening ceremony at the newly refurbished Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum said civil society had to do more: "Civil society has done quite a lot but it needs to do more to make itself more accountable."

The assembly will move the accountability agenda forward by launching a number of events and initiatives including the launch of the CIVICUS Global Survey of the State of Civil Society, the Poverty Requiem campaign, learning exchanges and the Youth Assembly under the banner of "Accountability: Delivering Results".

"The World Assembly is a place where these kinds of initiatives, as well as others, can be showcased, dissected and analysed so that civil society can move forward," said CIVICUS vice chair and president of the Association for Women's Rights and Development Aruna Rao.

The CIVICUS World Assembly takes place at the same time as "The Gathering" – a meeting of Scottish voluntary organisations.

"Why Glasgow? I like to think it is a meeting of minds. I like to think civil society in Scotland is willing to learn from the world," said Sime at a press conference earlier.

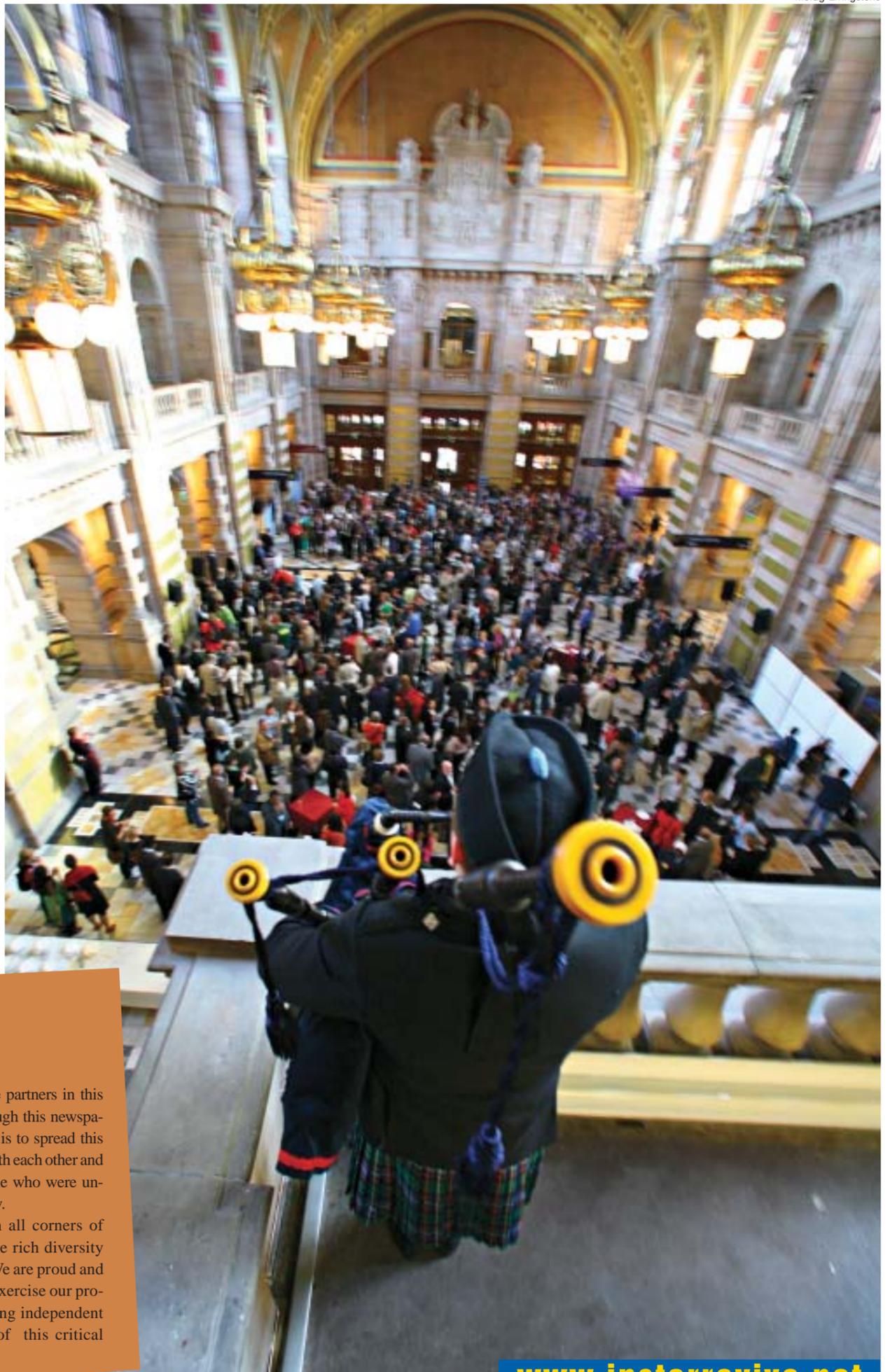
"The old adage that we need to think globally and act locally needs to be reversed as well. Civil society, in all its diversity, has an increasing responsibility to better join up and better connect in what is a much smaller world," added Sime.

This year's assembly aims to give voice to the millions around the world who, choked by poverty, remain unheard. It also intends to highlight the plight of those who have been silenced for speaking out against injustice and repression and are imprisoned by regimes who do not want them to be heard – including two Ethiopian "Make Poverty History" national campaigners Daniel Bekele and Netsanet Demissie who were arrested shortly before last year's conference.

CIVICUS Secretary General Kumi Naidoo said: "Why is it we hear nothing from countries that are supposed to be promoting democracy? The questions that face us now are those that arise between democracy, poverty and giving people a voice."

Four hundred Scottish choir singers launch the Poverty Requiem campaign this evening in an event that will be replicated across the world as other choirs, singers, and schoolchildren express their hope for an end to poverty through song.

Individuals and organisations can participate by visiting www.povertyrequiem.org.



Morag Livingstone

Letter from the Publisher

► Mario Lubetkin
Director General of IPS

Civil society around the world is facing adulthood, which means assuming more duties and responsibilities towards constituencies, donors and societies at large. Demands of accountability are the result of growth; they are the result of all the good work done and of all mistakes made in the process.

Accountability and the future projections of civil society organisations are at the core of this 7th Civicus World Assembly and

we at IPS are proud to be partners in this debate. Our mission, through this newspaper and our news agency, is to spread this debate, to link delegates with each other and with the millions of people who were unable to join us in Glasgow.

Our team comes from all corners of the world and reflects the rich diversity of the World Assembly. We are proud and thankful to, once again, exercise our professional duty of providing independent and accurate reporting of this critical civil society gathering.

www.ipsterraviva.net



Social Responsibility of the Fourth Estate

If MDGs, intended to reduce misery across the globe, are considered a goal that a vast majority endorses and so should make an effort to achieve, shouldn't responsible journalists and media feel an obligation to contribute to their realisation?

Should the media, which shape public opinion and orient a large part of our actions — political, commercial, social, cultural — share the same responsibilities as civil society organisations that fight for human rights and discriminated-against minorities around the world?

The traditional response has always been negative: the media and their journalists should limit themselves to informing the public objectively, without taking positions or involvement of any kind, whether political or social, with what they are covering.

But more and more media feel an identification with a mission that cannot be reduced to transmitting information and feel bound by a sense of social responsibility. And then there are those media linked to non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

Throughout its history, but especially in recent years, IPS news agency has sought to participate with different kinds of media in debates and reflection on our responsibility with regard to development issues. This experience has shown us that there is a clear and increasing acceptance by the media of forms of responsibility regarding social issues.

In 2005 we had the opportunity to organise in Florence a debate with print media, radio, and television on the social responsibility of the media. One example analysed was the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), established in 2000 by a majority of heads of state or government under the auspices of the UN. If these objectives, intended to reduce misery across the globe, are considered a goal that a vast majority endorses and so should make an effort to achieve,



shouldn't responsible journalists and media feel an obligation to contribute to their realisation?

This debate was remarkably spirited and interesting. Present were representatives from MTV, Al Jazeera, and Italy's Rai as well as agencies like IPS and Reuters, newspapers, and networks of

commercial and community radio, and together we analysed from each of our points of view our collective and individual role in communicating information critically and independently to our audiences on a subject that apparently is as distant to them as the MDGs, the fulfilment of which will improve

the lives of hundreds of millions of poor people.

This is but a single example of the sort of debate that one sees more and more in the media, such as the World Communications Congress held in Rome last November.

It is clear that for civil society

organisations, social responsibility is part of the objectives that were the reason for their establishment in different areas of development and the defense of freedoms and human rights. Thus at the end of 2005 a group of major NGOs created a code of conduct that, among other things, accepted the introduction of external oversight of their activities and defined their social commitment as the promotion of a social human development, the defence of human rights, and the protection of the eco-system.

There is nothing like this in the media. Rather there are various commonly accepted but uncodified rules, such as not revealing confidential sources or including the response of a criticised party. But these are no more than professional conventions and are far from the concept of social responsibility.

Perhaps this different attitude explains why in global surveys civil society is always seen as one of the most credible sectors, while the media are often felt to be among the least so. A recent poll by BBC World Service conducted in 32 countries found that less than half of those polled had a positive view of the media, and more than one quarter viewed them negatively. Similarly, a Gallup poll placed civil society among the first five actors in terms of positive vision.

We think that the code of conduct of the NGOs, which they created for themselves, contains elements that may be appropriate for the oversight and analysis of the media given the nature of their respective missions. The universal values of human rights, independence, freedom from discrimination, transparency, an ethic of self-financing, the practise of critical vision and evaluation, are some of the concepts that might be accepted by and applied to the media themselves. This might establish a common ground between these two major actors in the contemporary world.

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Mario Lubetkin
is Director General of
IPS News Agency.

“It’s true that accountability is not being exercised to the extent that it should be. Quite a large number of civil society organisations and NGOs have no organically-evolved mandate from the citizens”



Paulino Menezes

“Dangerous questions” on NGO accountability

Keeping Civil Society on the Straight and Narrow

► Johannesburg/Moyiga Nduru (IPS)

A few years ago, this IPS correspondent posed a question at a workshop in Johannesburg, South Africa, about whether non-governmental organisations (NGOs) should be held more accountable for their actions. Afterwards, the key speaker at the event pulled me aside, and issued a polite rebuke for my “dangerous question”.

The “dangerous question” has continued to crop up since then, however, reflecting a growing debate over standards of conduct within the humanitarian sector as it has assumed an ever more prominent role in public life. Civic groups are now being scrutinised over a range of issues — from accounting practices, to whether they are truly serving the needs of communities.

“It’s true that accountability is not being exercised to the extent that it should be. Quite a large number of civil society organisations and NGOs have no organically-evolved mandate from the citizens,” Ozias Tungwarara, director of the Johannesburg-based Open Society Institute, itself an NGO, told IPS.

An anonymous posting on the website of the Southern African NGO Network: “Many NGOs are not practicing what they preach and a good example is the HIV/AIDS activists. Soon after conducting a workshop, they are already getting promiscuous. Is it the money that attracts them to the job or the need to be socialists that want to see

Efforts are underway to develop formal systems of accountability for international NGOs – or INGOs: last year, eleven of these groups signed the ‘INGO Accountability Charter’.

change in the society?”

“Having worked for NGOs for almost four years, I can safely say that most of these NGOs just want funding and if not monitored, they convey it to their personal use,” added the writer.

Misunderstandings

Nicholas Mkaronda, co-ordinator of the Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition, a pressure group, takes a more positive view of the situation.

“I think there is a high level of accountability in the way civil society organisations and NGOs

handle their finances and address societal issues,” he told IPS from the coalition’s office in Johannesburg.

Mkaronda said complaints about NGO conduct may sometimes stem from public misunderstanding about the roles of these groups: “For example, the Zimbabwean community in South Africa expects us to mobilise resources to sort out shelter, feeding and legal (immigration) status. Yet our role is to highlight the crisis in Zimbabwe.”

Political and economic difficulties in South Africa’s northern neighbour have prompted an exodus from the country. Briefing journalists in Johannesburg in March, Pius Ncube, the Catholic Archbishop of Zimbabwe’s second largest city, Bulawayo, and an outspoken critic of the Harare government, put the number of Zimbabweans living in South Africa at over two million.

Accountability Charter

Efforts are underway to develop formal systems of accountability for international NGOs — or INGOs: last year, eleven of these groups signed the ‘INGO Accountability Charter’. The first document of its kind, the charter lays out a number of principles such groups should adhere to, to retain public trust in the non-governmental sector.

These include working “in genuine partnership” with local organisations and communities; complying with governance, accounting and reporting obligations in countries of operation; and bal-

ancing expectations of NGOs with the salaries needed to attract competent staff, when deciding on remuneration.

The charter also stipulates that INGO employees should be “enabled and encouraged” to become whistleblowers concerning activities by aid groups that are illegal, or which contradict the goals and commitments of these groups.

CIVICUS — the World Alliance for Citizen Participation — is serving as secretariat for the INGO Accountability Charter, administering processes to ensure that signatories are meeting their obligations, amongst others.

This Johannesburg-based network groups a variety of civil society organisations with the aim of strengthening civic participation in public life, particularly in areas of the world where this is under threat. The debate on civic accountability will also feature strongly during CIVICUS’s annual World Assembly in Glasgow, this week.

Effective citizens

Demands for accountability may intensify as NGOs attempt to have their views taken into account more broadly, including in the African Union’s (AU) discussions about continental governance.

African foreign affairs ministers met in the South African port city of Durban earlier in May to discuss strategies for achieving the union’s goal of political and economic integration of its 53 member states.

To date, however, “The public have not been involved in the AU’s conversation about continental governance, or had their views listened to. We cannot have a United States of Africa without citizenship,” noted Janah Ncube, senior programme officer at the Nairobi branch of the Agency for Cooperation and Research in Development, an international NGO, in a recent statement.

“Effective states require active citizens and the participation of all men and women in governance.”

TerraViva spoke to Civicus' World Assembly Manager Roseline Zigomo and the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO) World Assembly Project manager Eva Rehse about the road to the 2007 World Assembly, their expectations for this gathering of civil society activists and how it makes a real difference to people on the ground

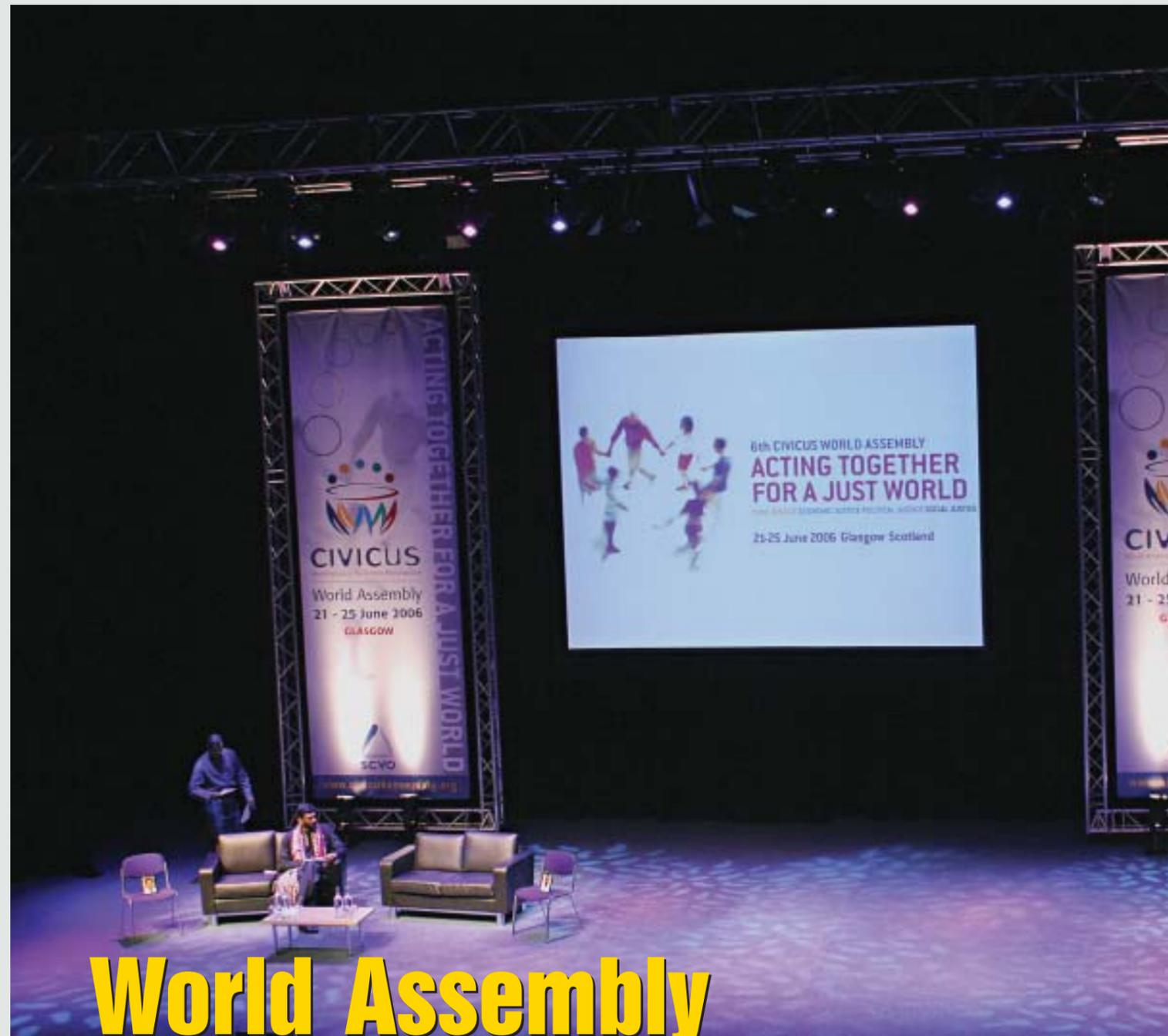
► Alejandro Kirk

TERRAVIVA (TV): How would you assess progress on issues such as poverty reduction/alleviation and new policies, since the World Assembly in June 2006?

EVA REHSE (ER): To me, the World Assembly is primarily about giving a convening space to civil society activists. It is about interaction and providing the opportunities for spontaneous collaborations, among themselves, but also with governments, donors, business and media.

There are actual tangible examples of collaboration and learning that each WA has shown. For us, as organisers, being able to capture and foster these is one of the main aims of having a WA in the first place. They may look like baby-steps in the bigger picture, but the feedback we have heard on numerous occasions from all fields of civil society activism is that they make a real difference to the people on the ground. It is now our challenge – after the three years of the Assembly in the United Kingdom – to capture this anecdotal evidence. It is a process we have already started.

One example that perhaps manifests the successes of the WA 2006 best is the CIVICUS Nelson Mandela – Graca Machel Innovation Awards. After each Assembly, delegates can nominate an idea, project or collaboration that has resulted from the Assembly for the award of \$5000. This year, one of the awards will be given to collaboration between a Scottish organisation



World Assembly

Unique Platform of Sharing

and a Nigerian organisation on Women Trafficking. Their collaboration is the result of one of our “Learning Exchanges”, which gave Scottish organisations the chance to meet our international guests on their own premises and exchange their experiences. For my organisation, the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations, this is the sort of example of outcomes we had hoped for when bidding to host the WA. It shows real, tangible international collaboration, fostered through us providing the opportunity and the space for this.

Another important outcome of last year’s Assembly is the “Intelligent Funder Track” which is a multi-year theme which will be featured throughout the CIVICUS World Assemblies in Glasgow 2006-2008, funded by the Big Lottery Fund, UK. The track raises the question of what

“intelligent funding” entails and how a more intelligent funding can be achieved. To this end, a number of international fellows are currently being invited to contribute to the Intelligent Funder Forum. It is an interesting and engaging discussion that is of interest both to funders and the funded, and it would not have been initiated without the arena of the WA.

ROSELINE ZIGOMO (RZ): The Media Track is another important outcome of the World Assembly, and also one of the multi-year tracks that the WA instituted to try and capture the learnings coming out of the discussions and dialogue during the Assembly. It is co-hosted by CIVICUS, International Press Service (IPS) and Oxfam NOVIB, and it is funded by Oxfam NOVIB. The

track is bringing together mainstream media and civil society leaders to dialogue around the issues of how civil society issues are reported by mainstream media; particularly, whether there is sufficient understanding of civil society issues and concerns, and also interest in that agenda by mainstream media. This is really important because a lot of work around poverty reduction and the attainment of the MDGs is being done at the local grassroots level by civil society practitioners, and yet it is the international campaigns that are reported on and make it to the front pages of mainstream media. This every day work behind the scenes is equally important to policy changes as the global campaigns, and the World Assembly is about bringing to the fore and sharing these stories amongst activists, practitioners and lead-



Morag Livingsstone

pliance with formal requirements to donors under contracts, there is a growing realisation by civil society that organisations need to show accountability to their beneficiaries for, inter alia, their own internal governance. This is wrapped up in the discussion around legitimacy of NGOs and transparency of their internal governance processes. This realisation has grown partly because NGOs have come under fire from other stakeholders, like government, who argue that NGO representatives are not elected and ask, therefore, on what basis do they purport to represent others. This places NGOs in a position of having to seriously consider self-regulation or face having it imposed on them by others who may not necessarily understand their constituencies and the work that they do, or the challenges they go through. This World Assembly will explore just how democratic NGOs actually are, and there are some interesting workshops that have been planned around Civil Society Organisations (CSO) Accountability, as well as a mini-plenary on Thursday May 24th on this specific issue. We particularly encourage people to read the Accountability Concept Paper that has been written for this Assembly by David Bonbright of Keystone Reporting with Srilatha Batliwala a Civil Society Research Fellow, The Hauser Center for Nonprofit Organisations, Harvard University. The paper is titled “*Answering for Ourselves: Accountability for Citizen Organisations*” and can be found through our website www.civicassembly.org.

TV: What is the political dimension of your work? How do you relate to political parties, trades unions and charities?

ER: In realising the WA, there are effectively two different types of management - the programme, for which Roseline is responsible, and the logistical side, which I oversee. Roseline's work is therefore much more “political” if you

ers for inspiration, and then debating and discussing these issues across sectors with the policy makers and the law makers from government, donor, business and the media.

TV: One of the WA's main issues is 'accountability'. Beyond financial reports, how does the democratic process work inside non-government organisations (NGOs) when it comes to policies, appointments and programmes?

ER: Accountability, on a very basic level, means holding each other responsible for one's actions. A lot of times, the focus is on holding governments, donors etc. accountable but there is a lot of discussion to be had about accountability within NGOs and this is what this WA has been chosen to focus on. How can we hold other sectors accountable if we are not accountable within ourselves? It is one of the questions that this WA will explore - what does this actually mean in practical terms? What are the different policies in different countries, and how can we learn from each other in this respect? Can there be an international code of conduct? What would this look like? It is set to be an interesting debate at the WA this year.

RZ: Most definitely and perhaps an honest look by all the sectors at their downward, upward, sideways and inward accountability. Beyond just com-



“We see the role of civil society within any given community as being more effective where civil society engages with political parties to find solutions to problems – sometimes critical and sometimes an ally.”

Roseline Zigomo, CIVICUS

like, in that it relates to the actors who are involved in the content of the Assembly. I do see a political dimension to my work, too, however.

Here in Scotland, it was our aim from the start to involve as many different actors from UK civil society as possible in the hosting process, in order to ensure broad representation and input. Our Host Committee comprises of around 15 representatives from government, donors, trade unions, religious and interfaith groups, and other NGOs with an interest in the WA and its topics. Their input is crucial in order to create a welcoming environment for the delegates, and at the same time, create opportunities for the UK sector to become involved in the process. In this respect, our outreach and stakeholder involvement has been vital to the Assembly's success.

RZ: CIVICUS has always been pushing for a more inclusive dialogue and action amongst civil society actors. Without going into the varying definitions of what is civil society, the World Assembly's overarching theme is “Acting Together for a Just World”, the emphasis being on collective action. We are looking at civil society in the very broadest of terms, to include trade unions, faith-based groups, women's organisations, etc. – sometimes these groups do not agree on specific issues, but on the generic issues that affect civil society more broadly, such as accountability, the right to express and associate freely they can agree and their voices are amplified when they are raised together. On these issues, they can and should work together to enhance or expand the space for civil society. In respect of political parties, the traditional view seems to be that they are forever locked as antagonists with civil society. However, we see the role of civil society within any given community as being more effective where civil society engages with political parties to find solutions to problems – sometimes critical and sometimes an ally. The World Assembly programme is therefore designed to bring to the table government leaders, civil society leaders, trade union representatives, donors of every kind to discuss various issues.

TV: Most funding for NGOs and campaigns like GCAP come from the North, in the form of development aid and donations from private foundations. Could this be a limitation when it comes to adopting political attitudes that might affect them?

ER: I think this will be one of the questions that the Intelligent Funder Forum will be discussing in various plenary sessions and workshops at the event. How do we move on from being passive recipients of funds and become involved in the decision-making process. I think this is a question that more and more is also of interest to the funders itself, who want to get the best possible outcome, and want to work together with the funded to make this happen. This is ultimately the discussion on how funding can be “intelligent”, and the WA is the forum for this discussion.

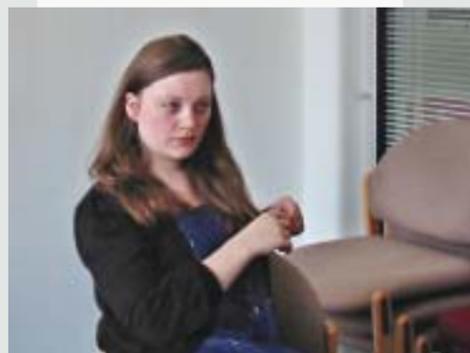
RZ: This is correct and it all comes down to donor accountability as well as CSO accountability. The stated missions of donors can sometimes come into conflict with those missions of the NGO they are partnering with and this directly impacts the effectiveness of aid more generally. The World Assembly is a safe space for these issues to be discussed in an open and transparent manner, without blaming or finger pointing. We have a few workshops lined up discussing these very issues from a donor perspective and from a donee perspective.

TV: How would you say the most dispossessed of the world are represented in the World Assembly?

ER: We knew from the outset that holding the World Assembly in the North meant that we needed to make available a large Participation Fund to enable a truly global gathering. We therefore have a general call for bursary applications each year, as well as strategically targeting contributors from grassroots organisations that we would like to invite to the World Assembly. We fund around 300 delegates' travel, hotel accommodation and subsistence on site of the conference with full grants. The delegates we choose to be bursary delegates are representatives of their communities, and we invest in them with the bursary knowing that they will take the learning from the Assembly back home with them, and that far more people will ultimately benefit.

Furthermore, we have our website www.civicassembly.org, which hosts a very lively discussion forum in which anyone can contribute. We will also, once again, broadcast the plenary sessions and other events through the website, so that anyone with internet access can take part in the event from their home countries.

RZ: The CIVICUS World Assembly has been held over the years in the North and the South alternately, in host cities such as Manila, Mexico City, Budapest, Vancouver, Gaborone and now Glasgow. CIVICUS really strives for a 50/50 North/South representation in the delegates attending through the Participation Fund, through the programme which tackles issues relevant to both sides of the globe dealt with by speakers from both the North and the South, and through its location. Not only that, but the World Assembly is unique in that it is a forum where grassroots activists can interact throughout the programme with representatives from international government organisations, donors, etc. – each one learning, sharing experiences and best practices, on an equal footing.



“The World Assembly is primarily about giving a convening space to civil society activists. It is about interaction and providing the opportunities for spontaneous collaborations, among themselves, but also with governments, donors, business and media.”

Eva Rehse, SCVO



Attempts to restrict foreign funding

Indian NGOs Balk at Tighter Gov't Controls

► New Delhi/Paranjay Guha Thakurta (IPS)

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in India are up in arms against moves by the federal government to regulate the flow of foreign funds into their coffers through a new bill that would amend existing law governing contributions from abroad.

Spokespersons for civil society groups describe the bill as “draconian”, “dangerous” and of “questionable merit”. The bill, they argue, would “stifle” and “choke” the working of hundreds of voluntary organisations, many of them engaged in alleviating poverty and empowering the underprivileged.

NGO workers also say the move is inexplicable at a time when the government is actively encouraging the inflow of foreign direct investments (FDI) in the corporate sector.

On Dec.18 last year, the centre-Left United Progressive Alliance government in New Delhi introduced this bill in the Rajya Sabha (upper house of parliament) without much fanfare. The proposed legislation is called the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Bill, 2006, which, if enacted, would repeal and replace the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA) of 1976.

The objectives of the bill have been spelt out in its very first sentence which states that it is meant “to consolidate the law to regulate the acceptance and utilisation of foreign contribution or foreign hospitality by certain individuals or associations or companies and to prohibit acceptance and utilisation of foreign contribution or foreign hospitality for any activities detrimental to the na-

tional interest and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto”.

“Political nature”

Currently being deliberated upon by the Indian Parliament’s Standing Committee on Home Affairs that comprises members from different political parties, the bill calls for a prohibition of foreign contributions to organisations of a “political nature, not being political parties”.

Under the existing law, such “political” organisations can receive foreign funds after they obtain the prior permission of the federal interior ministry that administers the FCRA.

The bill states that the federal government will provide a certificate of registration or give prior permission to an organisation to receive foreign contributions if it is satisfied that the applicant “has undertaken meaningful activity in its chosen field for the benefit of the people” or “has prepared a meaningful project for the benefit of the people”.

NGOs say the word “meaningful” and the phrase “benefit of the people” are both open to discretionary interpretation and the same is true

One wing of the Indian government (the Interior Ministry) is attempting to restrict the activities of NGOs while another (the Planning Commission) is asking civil society organisations to supplement the government's developmental efforts.

for what constitutes “foreign hospitality”.

Possible harassment

Whereas registration of an NGO is permanent and free under the current FCRA, the bill requires recipients of foreign funds to renew their registration every five years and introduces a scheme of payment of fees for registration, renewal of registration and prior approval for receipt of funds.

Representatives of civil society groups say this provision in the bill would not only generate inconvenience but could also lead to harassment by government officials.

“Who decides what constitutes political activity and what kind of activity is meaningful?” asked Rajesh Tandon, president of an NGO called Participatory Research in Asia. He told IPS that civil society groups do indeed “try and influence the politics and economics of development” and bureaucrats should not be allowed to curb their work so long as they do not violate the laws of the land.

Tandon found it ironic that one wing of the Indian government (the interior ministry) was attempting to restrict the activities of NGOs while

another (the Planning Commission) was asking civil society organisations to supplement the government’s developmental efforts.

“This bill gives civil servants the power to interfere with civil society activity, potentially undermining their vital work and violating their democratic freedoms,” Clare Doube, manager, CIVICUS, a “world alliance for citizen participation”, stated in a media release.

Recommending to the standing committee that the bill be dropped, this NGO has criticised what it calls “the cumbersome registration process, the bill’s overlap with existing laws and the excessive power it gives to authorities to de-register an organisation or search and seize its property”.

Media

The bill also seeks to impose a 50 percent limit on the total quantum of foreign contributions received by an NGO that can be spent as “administrative expenses”.

It also contains certain provisions meant for the media. It prohibits any association, company, correspondent or editor engaged in the production or broadcast of audio or audio-visual news or current affairs programmes from receiving foreign contributions.

“The bill is against India’s liberal, democratic ethos,” said Maja Daruwala, director, Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative. In an interview with IPS, she said the voluntary sector in India was growing and “coming on its own”. This sector was closely linked to people’s movements and “encouraged diversity and dissent that is part of the democratic fabric of India”.

“The bill goes beyond tracking the use of foreign money and intrudes into the management of NGOs in ways that I believe are illegitimate,” added Daruwala, who is in the forefront of a campaign against the bill.

In the past, supporters of the right-wing, Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party had sought curbs on the flow of foreign donations to NGOs on the ground that the funds were being misused to “entice” poor Hindu tribals and convert them into Christians.

Others have alleged that movements aimed at securing better compensation and rehabilitation for those displaced by the building of large irrigation projects have been “covertly” supported by foreign organisations.

Such allegations have been levelled against the well-known Narmada Bachao Andolan (‘Save Narmada Campaign’) led by Medha Patkar, which is opposed to the construction of a series of large dams across the River Narmada in central India.

Peanuts

Those opposed to the new bill contend that existing laws in India are adequate to ensure that foreign donations that are received through legal banking channels are not misused or illegally diverted. It is further pointed out that while the Indian government goes out of its way to welcome foreign investments in industry, it is seeking to curb and monitor the flow of foreign funds to NGOs.

“In comparison to the tens of billions of US dollars that are flowing into India’s corporate sector and its stock markets, the total amount received by the voluntary sector is peanuts,” said Pooran Chand Pandey, who represents Voluntary Action Network India. “In this respect, the bill that has been proposed is regressive and misplaced and I am hopeful it will be rejected.”

While the Indian government claims the bill would check the use of foreign funds for subversive activities of terrorists and ‘anti-national’ organisations, NGOs argue that the proposed new law could block funding for valuable and legitimate civil society activities.

International meeting in Uruguay

GCAP Extends Action until 2015

► Montevideo/Diana Cariboni (IPS)

The Global Call to Action against Poverty (GCAP) made a commitment in Uruguay earlier this month to extend their campaign until 2015, and to emphasise the structural causes that determine that over one billion people in the world are living in extreme poverty.

GCAP was launched in 2005, at the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil, as a one-year project, after which it was extended for another year, to 2007.

Now its component organisations have committed themselves to continuing the campaign until the 2015 deadline established by United Nations member countries to halve the proportion of people living in extreme poverty and suffering from hunger, from 1990 levels.

That is the first of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) adopted by the international community in 2000, which include commitments to specific targets to improve health, education, gender equality, the environment and sustainable development.

Roots of poverty

At the international meeting that brought together 150 leading activists in the Uruguayan capital, GCAP decided to "highlight the causes of poverty, with a particular emphasis on the groups specifically affected by social exclusion," such as women, indigenous peoples and other sectors that suffer discrimination, Ana Agostino, a member of the GCAP International Facilitation Group, told IPS.

The need for this focus was stressed by Latin American and Caribbean organisations, with the support of the Asia Group and women's organisations, said Agostino, a member of GCAP's Feminist Task Force.

"There was an intense debate on whether or not to include sexual orientation when referring to excluded groups, because GCAP is characterised by great diversity," with hundreds of non-governmental organisations and social movements from around the world, said Agostino.

Religious associations were opposed to including sexual orientation, and in the end the activists agreed to not specifically mention the question with respect to concrete measures and actions, which will be left up to each country to decide.

Stand Up and Speak Out

In 2006, GCAP and the U.N. Millennium Campaign promoted an initiative called "Stand Up Against Poverty", in which 23.5 million people around the world "stood up" on Oct. 17, the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty and made the Guinness Book of World Records. In 2007 they hope to mobilise 50 million people, under the slogan "Stand Up and Speak Out".

The "Stand Up" action in 2006 had little impact in Latin America. One of the reasons, according to activists consulted at the time by IPS, was that the region's own priorities and agenda were not sufficiently taken into account.

In some countries, "nothing happened; it basically passed unnoticed," said Agostino.

GCAP member organisations have committed themselves to continuing the campaign until the 2015 deadline established by United Nations for the Millennium Development Goals

This year, the aim is for each country and region to adopt their own "political messages" to promote participation in the coordinated Oct. 17 activities, among other measures aimed at increasing visibility of the event, said the activist.

The Latin American and Caribbean national coalitions and networks in GCAP said in San Salvador on Apr. 13 that the campaign should promote a view of poverty eradication based on justice, not charity.

This should involve not handouts for the poor, but ensuring the conditions for the full enjoyment of civil rights, without discrimination of any kind, said the activists meeting in the Salvadoran capital.

Political strategy

The future of GCAP will only be sustainable if there is clarity about its political objective, which should be the basis for developing its strategies, and if mechanisms are adopted to democratise the way it works and make deci-

sion-making transparent, said the San Salvador statement.

The conference in Montevideo ended with the participants "in high spirits," and with a "strong sense of reaffirmation of the validity of their campaign," said Agostino.

The activists decided to maintain their decision not to "institutionalise" the coalition and to meet every three years, until 2015, to assess the progress of their actions against poverty.

GCAP achieved peak visibility in 2005, when it devoted its energies to extracting concrete commitments from the Group of Eight (G8) most powerful countries in the world, at their meeting in Scotland that year.

Although the G8 promised on that occasion to increase aid to developing countries by up to 50 billion dollars by 2010, in fact development aid from rich countries fell by five percent in 2006, according to a report by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) which was published in April.

Keeping Track

GCAP demands to world leaders in 2005

► Immediately end dumping and rich country subsidies that keep people in poverty.

► Enact measures to protect public services from enforced liberalisation and privatisation, secure the right to food and affordable access to essential drugs and strengthen corporate accountability

► Increase accountability and transparency of governments and international organizations in the formulation of international trade rules and national trade policies.

► Give more, untied and better aid now to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

► Meet the agreed target of 0.7% of national income in aid.

► Ensure aid is directed towards achieving development objectives.

► Cancel debt: rich countries, the World Bank and the IMF, should cancel 100% of the debt of the poorest countries in order to reach the Millennium Goals.

► National efforts to eliminate poverty and to reach the Millennium Goals developed and implemented in a way that is democratic, transparent and accountable to citizens.



CenturyCambodia: Defeating poverty, building a future



Gleneagles 2005: GCAP activists demand action from the G8

German bishops said in a joint statement. "While the number of millionaires and billionaires is growing fast in some parts of the world, the numbers of the extreme poor remain stubbornly high."

Laurent Monsengwo, the archbishop of Kisangani, a diocese in the Democratic Republic of Congo, called on G8 leaders to "realise that there has been a globalisation of economic growth and therefore that there needs to be a globalisation of charity and responsibility".

Former rock musician Bob Geldof made a similar plea at a meeting in Berlin. Geldof, who launched a campaign for fighting famine in Africa with a series of rock concerts in the early 1980s, has been campaigning ever since to raise financial resources to support development policies in Africa.

"If anything works, it's development aid," Geldof said at an 'Intellectual Live 8' conference. Geldof also demanded that Germany, as host country, achieve the target of 0.7 percent of GDP for development aid.

"There's no lack of money, there's a lack of thought," Geldof said.

'Intellectual Live 8' presented eight policy measures to support Africa. These proposals range from unilaterally opening European and North American markets to agricultural products from Africa, to financially supporting African agriculture, health and education, especially for girls and women, and building infrastructure in major cities, especially water supply, treatment and sewage.

Hunting resources

Officially, G8 is taking all these subjects into consideration this year. But German officials have not concealed the fact that the G8 interest in Africa focuses also on the abundant natural resources on the continent, and the progress of emerging developing countries such as India and China in tapping such resources.

African-Chinese trade has grown fivefold since 2000 to reach 50 billion dollars in 2006. Chinese investment has risen since 2000 to more than 5.5 billion dollars in 43 African countries, making China Africa's third-largest economic partner, only behind the United States and France.

Such growth led German Chancellor Angela Merkel to declare that Europe "should not leave the commitment to Africa to the People's Republic of China".

"We must take a stand in Africa," Merkel told a conference on urban development in Berlin late last year, less than a week after an African-Chinese business and political summit in Beijing.

"It is obvious that access to natural resources, such as oil and cobalt, makes Africa interesting for Germany and Europe," German development expert Torben Ehlers told IPS. "And also, that the massive investment from China, India, Iran and other Asian countries puts pressure upon the West to re-establish hegemonic control upon this access."

Africa tells summit to increase economic cooperation

G8 Asked to Keep Its Promises

► Berlin/Julio Godoy (IPS)

Only a couple of weeks before this year's summit of the group of the eight most industrialised countries (G8), Africa and its immense needs are again the theme of the day.

Niger Prime Minister Hama Amadou and Togo Prime Minister Yawovi Agboyibo were in Berlin earlier this month to present their demands on economic cooperation with the G8.

They had support. University professors, musicians, philosophers, church representatives and political leaders from numerous countries also gathered in Berlin to discuss ways of supporting African people to deal with their social and economic challenges.

On June 6-8, the heads of government of Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia and the United States will meet in the German seaside resort Heiligendamm by the Baltic Sea.

As with the G8 summits over the last couple of years, the G8 agenda this year includes a special summit on Africa. "Attention will also be focused on urgent problems in Africa relating to economic development, poverty reduction and the fight against HIV/AIDS," an official note on the summit said.

Just words

But such promises, repeated by G8 leaders for years now, only draw scepticism among development experts and non-governmental organisations.

Catholic bishops from African and European countries came together in Berlin at the beginning of May to declare they were "disappointed" by the "lack of progress" by G8 countries towards the development aid targets set at the G8 summit in Gleneagles, Scotland, in 2005.

This lack of progress is most visible in official development assistance

(ODA) which fell 5.1 percent in 2006, according to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), a group of 30 rich nations.

According to the OECD report, aid to sub-Saharan Africa increased only two percent, excluding debt relief for Nigeria. This meagre growth contrasts with the tall promises the G8 leaders made in their 2005 summit at Gleneagles of doubling aid to Africa by 2010.

Gross inequalities

The bishops called on the G8 to commit themselves again to reaching the target of 0.7 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) for development aid by 2015, one of the UN targets towards meeting the Millennium Development Goals. These goals, primarily to reduce poverty and promote health and education, were agreed by world leaders in 2000.

"We see wealth and material fortune at the same time as abject poverty,"

"It is obvious that access to natural resources, such as oil and cobalt, makes Africa interesting for Germany and Europe. And also, that the massive investment from China, India, Iran and other Asian countries puts pressure upon the West to re-establish hegemonic control."



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