

Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations
2004 REGULAR SESSION
Monday 10 May 2004
Conference Room 1

Speech of the President of ECOSOC
H.E. Ambassador Marjatta Rasi

Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Members of the Secretariat,
NGO Representatives,
Dear Friends,
Dear Ms. Blajan,

It is my great pleasure to take part in the opening of the 2004 Session of this very special Committee. The Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations is the only inter-governmental body that deals exclusively with Non-Governmental Organizations and their relationship with the Economic and Social Council and, through it, the relationship with the United Nations.

At this point in time the international community is entering a new era of implementation directed towards achievement of the development goals established at the Millennium Summit and all the other international conferences aimed at finding global solutions to the challenges of the 21st century. As the coordinating body for the UN system's activities in support of global economic and social development and the central forum for interaction among all the major partners in development, the role and functions of the Economic and Social Council have taken on new dimensions. And so have the role and functions of the various entities charged with support of the Council and its activities.

This Committee, which is the portal that brings the valuable contributions of the NGO Sector to the work of the Council and the United Nations at large, is particularly significant. Ultimately, the outcome of your deliberations and recommendations ensure the direction and the quality of the rich and dynamic partnership between ECOSOC and the broad range of actors in the global NGO community.

The way this Committee works is an essential part of how much and how well it succeeds in filling its weighty mandate. The NGO Committee has already made its mark as a pioneer in transforming the intergovernmental meeting process through its introduction of the electronic system that has been dubbed “the Paperless Committee” and, thereby, enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of its work.

In the same vein, I understand that this session inaugurates a considerable restructuring of the Committee’s meeting schedule and one that will by the year 2005 enable the Committee to enhance even further its most indispensable contribution to ECOSOC by presenting a consolidated report of its yearly activities to that body at its annual regular session, thus, greatly enhancing the ability of ECOSOC to broaden and strengthen its linkages with vital new partners from the global NGO Community.

Clearly, this Committee continues to devote itself to finding the best possible ways to support the Economic and Social Council in sustaining its partnership with NGOs and likewise to supporting the NGO Community in contributing optimally to the work of the Council.

In this regard, I should like to take this opportunity to recognize the special and unique contribution to the NGO Committee made by Ms. Mihaela Blajan of Romania, its out-going chair. She is one of the few women to have presided over this 57 year old body and she has distinguished her term of office by providing direction and focus to the Committee while at the same time displaying a very special capacity for consensus

building. During her chairmanship enormous progress was made in the on-going effort to redress the imbalance in ECOSOC between the heavily represented northern NGOs and the relatively small number of NGOs from developing countries in the south and from countries with economies in transition. For example, of the 69 NGOs recommended for status at the resumed session of December 2003 over half were from developing countries and from countries in transition. Ms. Blajan own contribution to the region she represents was realized in the establishment of the UN Informal Regional Network (UN-NGO-IRENE) in Eastern Europe in 2003. Through her personal contribution it is hoped that civil society in this important region of the world will now play a much greater role in the inter-governmental process of the UN.

I understand that Ms. Blajan now has the important responsibility in her capacity as a Deputy-Director to guide the process of her country to join to the European Union. We wish her in this critical endeavor, great success.

In saying farewell to Ms. Blajan I am pleased to welcome the new chairperson from the Islamic Republic of Iran. I look forward to working with you and all the members of this Committee to further strengthen the continually evolving relationship with NGOs that is indispensable to the Council in achieving its objectives.

Thank you.