

## Democratizing Global Governance: Principles for the Engagement of Civil Society Organizations with Multilateralism

The FIM Secretariat  
Montréal  
November 3, 2009

*Principles for the Engagement of Civil Society Organizations with Multilateralism*, hereafter referred to as CSOs, is intended for local, national, regional, and international civil society organizations networks, alliances, and coalitions, who are working to democratize the activities, programmes, policies, and practices of multilateral institutions and of the multilateral system.

A key mission of Forum international de Montréal (FIM) is to capture and disseminate strategies and lessons learned by these activists. *Principles for the Engagement of CSOs with Multilateralism* was developed in response to a realization, within the FIM network, of the need to build upon the strategies and lessons that FIM has captured since its' inception in 1998 and to create general principles for good practice.

*Principles for the Engagement of CSOs with Multilateralism* represents FIM's reflections and experience. They are drawn from practitioner experience and knowledge documented in FIM case studies and reports, discussed at FIM conferences and fora, and reported in an international survey of civil society leaders. These principles aim to capture the highest possible, or ideal, values and standards of conduct for CSO engagement with the multilateral system. They are premised upon the following FIM convictions: (1) Democratized multilateralism, at all levels from regional to sub global to global, is a necessary condition for attaining democratic global governance and (2) Active engagement of CSOs with multilateralism is essential to achieving this vision.

FIM does not in any way claim to represent the opinions of CSOs in general or of civil society at large. We hope however that these principles for good practice will help to spark and inform CSO reflection on values and standards, both for engagement and, where necessary, disengagement with multilateral institutions.

This document is a "living" work in progress and will be further developed by FIM through ongoing input from civil society activists. It presents the following eight *Principles for the Engagement of CSOs with Multilateralism*:

1. That CSOs build and maintain local to global and global to local links.
2. That CSOs document and disseminate their practitioner knowledge.
3. That CSOs embrace the full diversity of their Sector.
4. That CSOs understand the broad context of global governance.
5. That CSOs are willing and able to engage, and to disengage, diplomatically with those who do not share their vision of the common good.
6. That CSOs are actively committed to their long term vision and goals.
7. That CSOs are open and transparent about who they represent and to whom they are accountable.
8. That CSOs align their practice with their values.

We welcome your comments.

## Democratizing Global Governance: Principles for the Engagement of Civil Society Organizations with Multilateralism

### Definitions:

*Global Governance:* The overseeing of agreements, made amongst a plurality of sovereign states, that are lawfully binding for these signatory states, and that have global impacts.

*Democratize Global Governance:* To implement a process whereby citizens and or their elected representatives participate directly in all facets of global governance including the preparation of public policy and the planning, implementation, and monitoring of any ensuing legislation.

*Civil Society:* The sector of society, distinct from the State and the Market, where citizens, through their relationships with one another, pursue a shared vision of the common good and of a just world where all beings have a peaceful and harmonious life.

*Principle:* A fundamental standard of good conduct based upon values that can be shared by a community of practice.

*Civil Society Organization (CSO):* Groups such as community groups, non-governmental organizations, labour unions, Indigenous Peoples' organizations, charitable organizations, faith-based organizations, professional associations, and foundations that pursue common purposes.

*Multilateralism:* Multiple countries working in concert with each other on a given issue.

### The Principles:

1. *That CSOs build and maintain local to global and global to local links.*

The wisdom, experience, and knowledge of the people form the roots of democratic global governance. Indeed, local cultures are the guardians of universal values that need to be upheld by the international community and infused into dialogue at all levels. Successful and sustainable regional and international democratization processes are grounded in people's values and in the dynamics and realities of their local and national struggles and priorities. This principle asserts that CSOs at these local and national levels constitute the broad and essential base for civil society credibility and legitimacy and for achieving sustainable change and reform at all levels of the multilateral system. Indeed, the most significant changes occur at international as well as national levels when reform efforts are buttressed, if not driven, by domestic, well organized, and informed civil society. Building and maintaining CSO linkages from this local base to the global arena and back to the local is fundamental to democratization of global governance.

Robust local to global and global to local links serve to ground CSO dialogue and action in the realities of the people. Such linkages enable a balanced flow of information and provide the overall coherence and context essential for informed action and shared guidance. These linkages are the mechanisms that allow CSOs, working at regional and global levels, to draw from local and national realities. Local to global linkages also make it possible for regional and international activists to inform activists at local levels as to how their priorities both affect, and are affected by, the broader regional and international contexts.

This principle recognizes that democratization of global governance is impeded by the marginalizing effects of the imbalance of power and influence between CSOs working at local and national levels and more powerful and influential international CSOs. Actions that serve to mitigate this

power imbalance include: conducting rigorous local to global analyses; building local to global civil society coalitions, alliances, networks, campaigns, and multi stakeholder partnerships; transfer of knowledge and financial resources from larger, richer CSOs to smaller, poorer CSOs; and utilization of new and emerging information and communications technologies.

2. *That CSOs document and disseminate their practitioner knowledge.*

Documentation and dissemination of CSO experience, knowledge, and lessons learned is foundational to good practice and to the democratization of global governance. CSOs need to reflect upon and learn from the past, share their lessons and strategies with the wider community, and systematically transfer this knowledge to the next generation.

The current deficit of accessible civil society knowledge and wisdom extends from the local to the global, impeding progress toward democratic governance at all levels of society. A recognized, valid, and legitimate practitioner knowledge base is essential for CSOs to be able to communicate effectively within the diversity of its own Sector and beyond. CSOs require capacities to conscientiously document and share their experience and knowledge in forms that are widely accessible.

While the new social media will democratize access to, and production of, knowledge, it behooves CSOs to develop methodologies, language, symbols, and tools that are both distinct to the Sector and accessible. Such methodologies need to be appropriate for capturing and conveying civil society's unique perspectives, knowledge, experience, values, and visions.

Civil society practitioner experience, analyses, visions, and values should be disseminated in a timely fashion to be systematically debated and shared around the world. Practitioner knowledge should avoid jargon and unnecessary mystification of the important and complex issues concerning global governance and aim to serve and inform the citizenry in general as well as professional civil society activists, academics, donors, and multilateral officials.

Civil society knowledge networking and collaboration, as well as professional development opportunities, including opportunities to develop a distinct scholarship of practice, are avenues for civil society to meet its responsibilities to document and communicate what it has learned. Importantly, civil society actors ought to be proactive in legitimizing their practitioner experience and research by placing knowledge that is rooted in their communities at the forefront of their reports and analyses.

3. *That CSOs embrace the full diversity of their Sector.*

Democratization of global governance is a global civil society objective, approached from a diversity of civil society perspectives, and spanning local to global levels. This diversity is civil society's defining quality and strength. Diversity fosters the richness of dialogue and the generation of fresh ideas that hold the potential for peace and harmony for all earth's beings. Full inclusion of all voices and levels and of the ever increasing diversity of civil society's issues, causes, and points of view is a necessary condition for achieving democratic global governance. To value civil society diversity is to value and empower civil society as a multifaceted Sector as well as the coalitions, alliances, and networks that advance its purposes and activities.

CSO purposes and activities encompass the entirety of human aspirations, concerns and problems. This diversity is reflected in the many configurations of citizens associations including: traditional tribes or castes, religious, membership (e.g. professional associations, trade unions, workers or women's rights groups, self-help groups), and Non Governmental Organizations (often advancing larger social causes). These configurations often advance specific causes and issues and this singular focus can be the most effective way to address many global governance issues. Single issue approaches

can be counterproductive however when change has far reaching, often global, implications for the earth and for humanity. The “silo” approach is not sufficient in itself.

Given that humanity now lives within the increasing complexity of an interconnected, globalized world, CSOs working to democratize global governance ought to be able to consult and collaborate across the broad spectrum of diverse civil society issues and organizations and to work effectively outside the bounds of the familiar. This principle recognizes that the complexity of diversity and the demands of inclusiveness can also be limiting factors that slow progress. In order to address this reality, and for CSOs to be able to release the power and strength of its diversity, CSOs require the capacity to communicate, collaborate, and negotiate across its Sector. Solutions to global problems require the ingenuity that is only possible through balancing the tensions of diversity. In the face of divergent points of view, CSOs require capacities to both acknowledge and affirm their common purpose and to value and preserve the diversity of points of view essential to healthy democratization. The more that the multiplicity of voices of the Civil Society Sector is heard, the closer humanity will be to achieving democratization of the multilateral system and of global governance.

4. *That CSOs understand the broad context of global governance.*

Democratization of global governance is a systemic project where all seemingly separate issues are part of a larger, interrelated whole. The capacity of CSOs to understand and to work within this broad political, social, and economic context is essential to the achievement of democratic global governance. These contexts include: the diverse and changing social and political realities of people living and working in their communities, the academic community, individual governments, donors, and other actors engaged in democratization of global governance. CSOs must also be aware of, and sensitive to, the various linkages and interrelationships amongst these contexts.

Critically, in order to influence multilateral policies, programmes, and practices, CSOs must understand multilateralism as a concept and phenomenon as well as the specific multilateral agencies and representatives that they wish to influence. Understanding the broader context requires a willingness and ability to do the needed research and to listen and learn from others with different, and sometimes conflicting, concerns and agendas. An understanding of multilateralism and the multilateral system as a whole is the basis for sharp analyses, well constructed agendas, timely and viable solutions, and informed advocacy efforts.

The more diligently civil society practitioners strive to understand the contexts surrounding their work the more effective they will be as leaders able to identify contradictions within and amongst sectors, organizations, and communities and within and between multilateral institutions. Informed and effective civil society leadership reduces unnecessary duplication of effort and reveals blocks to progress.

5. *That CSOs are willing and able to engage, and to disengage, diplomatically with those who do not share their vision of the common good.*

In addition to advocacy capacities, CSOs require diplomacy capacities that will enable them to engage directly with those persons or institutions with which they might otherwise avoid dialogue. In the face of an increasingly complex globalized world, CSOs need to be able to engage, as credible and legitimate “civil society diplomats”.

CSOs working to democratize global governance pursue a shared vision of the common good and of a just world where citizens and/or their elected representatives participate directly in all facets of global governance. Given this inclusive vision, CSOs need to be willing and able to work directly with

those who do not share their vision. This includes governments, multilateral bodies, corporations, institutions, and individuals.

To date, democratic oversight of powerful multilateral institutions and systems has failed. This is evidenced by the ongoing global crises that threaten the well being of the earth and of all beings. As these crises increase in severity and global impact the need for CSO diplomacy skills grows more urgent. CSOs must be able to engage in skilled, formal, and informal diplomacy at the highest levels.

Diplomacy occurs in a context where those with divergent values and agendas can work together. Diplomacy focuses on building relationships and bridges toward constructive communication and collaboration. It fosters understanding and respect for others' experiences and points of view and requires a commitment to frank, honest, and open exchange.

Through the application of diplomatic skills and the adoption of distinct diplomatic methods (e.g. the *Chatham House Rule* as an aid to free discussion) CSOs can make critical contributions to democratization of global governance that only they can make and that will be lost without diplomacy. Through diplomacy it becomes more possible to constructively address global concerns and well being and to prevent the tragedies and global crises that CSOs, working locally, are often the first to experience and to predict.

CSOs engaged in diplomatic dialogue with multilateral organization(s) can choose to constructively disengage with these agencies. Before deciding to disengage, CSOs must thoroughly assess their own engagement in the diplomatic process. Only when convinced that they have exhausted every viable diplomatic option and that no further diplomatic progress is feasible should CSOs, temporarily or permanently, disengage.

6. *That CSOs are actively committed to their long term vision and goals.*

Sustained change and measurable progress toward the vision of democratization of global governance can take years and even generations. CSO commitment over the long term is essential to achieving this vision. This principle values CSO patience and persistence. It warns of the danger and counter-productiveness of cynicism which can take hold of beleaguered civil society activists. It also stresses the importance for CSOs to challenge and change their own policies and practices, as well as the policies and practices of donor communities, which focus on short term results only and ignore or devalue the long term vision and goals of democratization.

CSO commitment to democratization of global governance is expressed through action. Actions include the diligent maintenance of CSO histories and institutional memories. Commitment to the long term also requires maintenance over time of effective working relationships across the civil society Sector and with governments and donors. Importantly, CSO commitment includes assessment and evaluation of internal performance and effectiveness and of progress toward global democratization.

Formal follow up surveys and studies and benchmarking, including global benchmarking, provide to CSOs and to their partners, evidence of the medium and long term results and impacts of their programmes and activities. Evidence, gathered over the long term, illustrates the enduring lessons and incremental progress that can be seen only through the perspective of time.

Active commitment to the long term goal of democratized global governance renews CSO faith and hope and rejuvenates the shared vision of the common good and of a world where all beings have a harmonious life.

7. *That CSOs are open and transparent about whom they represent and to whom they are accountable.*

CSO openness, honesty, and transparency regarding who they represent and to whom they are accountable are critical factors for establishing and maintaining CSO legitimacy and credibility. Civil society practitioners and their organizations, alliances, and networks should be rigorous in identifying and communicating who they represent and to whom they are accountable.

In the context of these principles “to represent” is restricted in meaning to situations where spokespersons have been formally mandated to speak on behalf of a clearly identifiable group. CSOs are the participative, as opposed to the representative, aspect of democracy. They cannot claim to represent “the people” in the way that parliamentarians and democratic governments can. CSOs represent those who have mandated them to carry out their mission. This includes: memberships, constituencies, and Boards of Directors or overseers. Thus, within the democratic context, CSOs are accountable to those they can claim to represent and, conversely, CSOs represent those to whom they are accountable. CSOs cannot claim to represent causes.

Civil society activists and organizations do have full citizen rights, as the participatory component of democracy, to champion values, issues, and causes and to propose solutions to problems that affect citizens. While they cannot claim to represent issues, beliefs, peoples, or causes in general, CSOs working to democratize global governance can capture and reflect the voices of the disadvantaged and marginalized and of those who are not represented or are under-represented. Given their direct impact on multilateral bodies and on democracy development, CSOs working to democratize multilateral bodies are responsible to accurately and faithfully reflect these voices.

8. *That CSOs align their practice with their values.*

The *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* offers to CSOs common standards of human conduct for all of the world’s people. CSOs singularly, and in their various configurations of alliances and networks, should strive to uphold these universal principles in all policies and practices.

We recognize that the actions of civil society activists and CSOs are not always consistent with their stated goals and values. Direct application of ideal standards in real-world situations can seem impractical and is sometimes very difficult to achieve. Practice, unlike theory, is affected by complex contextual factors and does not always fully reflect the principles and ideals of civil society actors or CSOs. It is nevertheless imperative for CSOs to articulate their ideals and values, to champion the highest standards of conduct, and to strive consciously and systematically to meet these standards. Indeed, given the nature and function of CSOs as embodying a “civil” Sector committed to advancing the common good, CSOs must maintain their legitimacy and credibility in the public, private, governmental, and multilateral spheres, in order to realize their very meaning and purpose. Close alignment of practices and stated values is essential to CSO credibility and legitimacy.

Alignment of CSO practices, policies, and values is achieved through ongoing self assessment, evaluation, and improvement. Willingness on the part of CSOs to self reflect, to identify gaps between their values and actions, and to strive continuously and courageously to be true to their principles is the great hope for a harmonious and peaceful world for all beings.