INGOS: GAINING A ROLE IN GLOBAL GOVERNANCE

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Summary

The fear that local armed conflicts might escalate to regional and perhaps international wars no longer has top priority on the agendas of international organizations. Threats to our life support systems from environmental damage, infectious diseases, denial of human rights, and poverty, hunger, and homelessness, are all prime subjects of UN and other international governmental organization (IGO) programs. An increasingly large number of international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs), finding such programs inadequate, have coalesced across issue and geographic boundaries to improve them. INGO goals, strategies, and successes and failures in five issue areas are reviewed: peacekeeping, human rights, population growth, the role of women in development, and the increasing globalization of the economic sector. The first three world problems appear to be at stalemate, the result of hard core resistance to political and cultural change. Coalescence and efficient management on the part of groups working on the role of women in sustainable development issues may meet with greater

success. Their use of the Internet, grassroots networking, and their willingness to bridge the gap between the traditional sectors, East and West, North and South, to learn from each other has not won any final victories but they offer lessons and encouragement to advocates for resolution of major global problems. In recognition of the basic need to build strength within each country, INGOs are giving a high priority to a collaboration, which shares resources, viewpoints, and the planning and carrying out of strategies within each of the UN member states.

1. Introduction: Evaluating the Global Civil Society

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) routinely play significant roles in the conduct of national governance. In democratic states they are, or should be, free to influence the course of public policy on behalf of constituents who might otherwise lack a voice in the process. At the international level, global governance is primarily in the hands of the United Nations (UN) system, guided by the precepts set forth in the UN Charter. These precepts perform the same function as constitutions do for democratic states.

International security questions, peacekeeping, control of disease pandemics, environmental pollution and other threats to our life support systems, are now on the agendas of the UN system and an increasingly large number of international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs). Resolution of issues by the UN, and other international governmental organizations, has more often failed than succeeded. The universality of the UN has facilitated member state consensus on major decisions to deal with critical issues. New agencies and new programs are created, but implementation falters. The UN encourages INGOs and NGOs and facilitates their participation in its policy processes. Despite the growth of the INGO movement, stalemates in the resolution of international crises are more the rule than is their resolution.

This topic explores the experiences of INGOs as they exercise the prerogatives of global civil society membership, their collective impact on global governance and the special characteristics of success and failure.

A broad outline of the topic guided its development. Authors were asked to consider:

- the status and history of the issues which have prompted the formation of INGOs,
- the historical development of INGOs as they succeed or fail in meeting their goals, and
- questions related to the formation of an "international civil society" and the potential it might have to influence global governance as they seek to resolve increasingly complex and serious social, economic, environmental, and peace issues.

The issues covered in this topic are inevitably on a track with those faced by the UN system. Alger's introduction to the first topic, *International Issues and IGO Goals in the Post-World War II Period*, illuminates the dynamic development of the UN, pointing to its major achievements, its introduction and continued support for universal membership, and its responsive array of a growing number of organizations and programs. The barriers between people and the UN have been lowered, in part by the

insistence of a vast number of INGOs and NGOs and in part by the inspired leadership of the Secretariat with the cooperation of member states. But the articles in the first topic report that global governance is, by and large, a failure. Failures are experienced in peacekeeping, the fight against AIDS, combating water, air, and atmospheric pollution, and in other issue areas. And while each problem is unique, criticism of the actions taken to resolve them is everywhere the same: rhetoric rules rather than reality; member governments ratify conventions but for the most part are unwilling to absorb the changes they require into their own political and social systems.

Major global issues have driven the formation and growth of tens of thousands of INGOs and nationally oriented NGOs in the post-Second World War period. Many groups have made good use of the new communications technology to learn more about issues and coordinate with allies across national and issue boundaries. And yet the impact of groups pursuing peace and disarmament, effective controls on pollution, and protection for the victims of human rights abuses, family planning in developing countries, and even for reform of the UN itself, has been in most cases ineffective. At the same time there is promise for greater achievements for the INGO sector in the development of strong worldwide coalitions. Networks of activists concerned with the impact of economic development on the status of women, is one example. Another is the coalition of groups that objects to corporate globalization and its threat to the quality of life in developing countries.

2. The Global Civic Society: its Rationale and Potential

The civil society has been described by policy analysts as a "third cell" between the market and the state, a "civil space" occupied by "public beings," non-governmental and non-commercial citizens and organizations devoted to the public good. This description falters over the use of the term "public good." Members of the National Rifle Association in the US believe that they are contributing to the public good as much as the gun control activists believe they are improving national security. Similarly, the Vatican is as sure that denial of contraceptives serves the public good, as family planning organizations are when they urge their availability. In every issue area, groups sometimes coalesce and sometimes compete. A full understanding of the dynamics of the global governance decision process must take account of the effectiveness of supporters and opponents of each policy goal.

The European Union provides more accurate benchmarks for measuring the role of the civil society in transition countries. Applicant eastern bloc countries must adopt institutions and legislation, which provide political stability, and a democratic resolution of basic political conflicts. Changes are required in government decision processes, administrative structures, party systems, and its civil society. In EU terms the civil society is part of governance but external to government; the democratic status of interest groups, non-governmental organizations, and the media, is determined by levels of freedom and responsiveness to constituents. Single party systems must give way to multiple political parties, and freedom granted to the media and to NGOs

As defined in this theme the nongovernmental sector is made up of organizations with goals established by their constituents, as they perceive the "public good." As the term

is used in this article, NGOs are distinguished from other organizations not part of any government (universities, hospitals, corporations, *inter alia*) by their public interest goals. They are created by individuals or groups to advance their shared interests on the local, regional, or international level. Their constituency may be part of the profit or non-profit sector; NGOs may represent business corporations (Chambers of Commerce) or employees (labor unions). Internationally, groups may support lower tariffs on exports and imports, or they may oppose them. They may be devoted to the preservation of peace, a sound environment, a stable and safe water supply or they may seek to protect the interests of corporations or other entities opposing the regulation of weaponry, energy resources, and the like.

In the post-Second World War era, INGO goals and strategies have been identified with issues of regional and international peace, quality of life concerns in developed and developing countries, and the dangers of disease pandemics. The achievement of national and international policy decisions favorable to INGO constituents in the more critical issue areas requires sets of complex skills and other resources. The issues of concern to IGOs and INGOs may be categorized in a number of ways. Broadly they relate to:

- regional and global peace and security;
- social and humanitarian concerns: hunger, disease, poverty, family planning;
- economic issues: trade, currency and financial transactions, sustainable development;
- support for the recognition and enforcement of universal human rights for women, and ethnic, religious, and other minorities.

The primary issues overlap and intersect, as do their numerous sub-issues. War exacerbates conditions requiring social and humanitarian programs; the safeguarding of human rights includes achievement of gender equality, which in turn has been shown to relate to the effectiveness of family planning programs, and so on. The most recent volume of the Union of International Associations, *Yearbook of International Organizations* lists over 30 000 international government organizations, with a large percentage of INGOs or NGOs with international goals. It categorizes them under 200 "common ideas, aims, and activities…" Estimates of their effectiveness should consider their ability to respond positively to the continual changes which take place in issue areas, as basic to their success.

3. Major Issues at Stalemate?

The threat to international security, once focused on armed conflict, now shares priority with other major threats to our life support systems. Peace movements began in the aftermath of nineteenth century wars; their supporters in the twentieth century backed the League of Nations and United Nations as well as the control of armaments, including eventually, nuclear weaponry. Environmental pollution, the wanton destruction of natural resources, the spread of infectious diseases, increasing poverty in the post-colonial world, brought about new legions of INGOs, and new movements. This section focuses on INGO activity in three issue areas: peacekeeping, protection of human rights for all individuals, and the need to control population growth. The INGOs

discussed in this topic have publicized what they regard as the desperate need for action to reduce the threats of each. They have participated in international meetings, assisted in the formulation of programs, and pressured for action at the UN and national level. While their efforts continue, government leaders individually and sometimes in coalition, remain reluctant to adopt and sustain positive measures to meet each threat. The reasons for these failures, somewhat different in each case, are a subject of interest to all those who support democratic global governance and the need for a free and active international civil society.

3.1 Peace and Disarmament Movements

INGOs identified with the quest for international peace and security have lobbied for the creation of an international system with power to end conflicts among its members and throughout the world, and an effective global agreement on the reduction and eventual destruction of armaments of all kinds, including nuclear weaponry. In search of a global organization with the power to achieve these goals, supporters lost out in mid-century to the east-west stalemate, generated by the use of veto power in the Security Council. Disarmament groups forfeited effective arms control to regional alliances supporting the intensive development of nuclear and other weaponry. And they have not yet been able to consummate the full implementation of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty.

3.1.1 Peacekeeping Strategies

In the post-Cold War period, peacekeeping efforts failed to resolve bloody insurrections and wars in post-colonial Africa, Latin America, and Asia. Violence perpetrated by the leaders of the rump Yugoslav republic of Serbia added hundreds of thousands of dead, wounded, and displaced, to the casualty lists of regional wars. Many INGOs continued to pursue their goals of peace but were faced with two difficult systemic problems: the lack of full support for any peacekeeping mission from the Security Council and the perception of member governments that they should reserve the right to react unilaterally and forcefully to immediate security risks. The civil society in any country has limited influence on the formation of national foreign policy which, in any case, is rarely made in the glare of public scrutiny. There have been exceptions to this general rule. Mass protests against the continuation of the conflict in Vietnam in the late 1960s and early 1970s, for example, heavily influenced the US decision to withdraw from the conflict.

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Biographical Sketch

Dr. Irene Lyons Murphy is an author and policy analyst who specializes in national and international policy issues. She has most recently been a faculty affiliate at Colorado State University and previously was an adjunct professor at George Washington University. In the fall of 1990, she received a Fulbright grant to work at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences in Sofia, Bulgaria which led to 3 years' work in Eastern Europe, related to the international environment, including public participation in governmental decision making. She has written extensively in the field of national and international policies related to the environment and human rights. She is the author of *Public Policy on the Status of Women*, Lexington Books, 1974; *The Danube: a River Basin in Transition*, Kluwer, 1997. She is the editor of *Protecting Danube Resources: Ensuring Access to Environmental Data and Information*, Kluwer, 1997, and has published a number of articles and monographs on international management of natural resource issues.

She has a masters and Ph.D. degree in Political Science from Columbia University and is a graduate of Barnard College. She presently works as an independent consultant in Washington, DC.