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**Statement of H.E. Mr. Julian Robert Hunte,
President of the 58th Session of the General Assembly,
at the General Assembly of the Conference of Non-Governmental
Organizations in Consultative Relationship “Inclusive Global
Governance: Challenges and Opportunities for CONGO in
Partnership with the United Nations”**

Madam President of CONGO, Mr. President of the Geneva Cantonal Government, Mr. Director General of the United Nations Office at Geneva, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am pleased, as President of the Fifty-eighth Session of the United Nations General Assembly, to have been invited to address this CONGO General Assembly, as it takes up critical issues on the international agenda under the apt and thought provoking theme, "Inclusive Global Governance: Challenges and Opportunities for CONGO in Partnership with the United Nations." I wish especially to greet your President, Renaté Bloem, for communicating, very effectively, that difficulties in the schedule of the President of the United Nations General Assembly can be surmounted, in the interest of building partnerships.

The key concepts in the theme of this General Assembly, I believe, sums up appropriately the juncture at which the United Nations, and indeed the international community, now stands. This is a time of immense challenges, and also a time of great opportunity. As well, it is a time when the United Nations can accomplish its goals and objectives only through cooperation. An essential element of this cooperation is building viable and mutually beneficial partnerships.

I was encouraged by CONGO's approach to the issues before its Assembly to reflect on the changes and challenges facing the international community today, focusing especially on the United Nations and civil society. This is a welcome opportunity to share with you some of my thoughts on the contribution civil society is making, and can make, to the work of the United Nations, as well as ways we might work together to more effectively adapt to change, and to meet global challenges head on.

The dramatic changes that have occurred in the fifty-eight years since the United Nations Charter was framed and signed at San Francisco have not escaped any of us. The most visible difference has been the almost fourfold increase in the membership of the United Nations, from the fifty-one members at San Francisco, to the one hundred and ninety one members today - the consequence of a successful decolonization process.

Decision-making among fifty-one states is definitely less complicated than decision-making among one hundred and ninety one. Notwithstanding, there is, surprisingly, much common ground among United Nations Member States on global issues. But many of the difficult issues

that demand hard choices, be they in the area of peace and security, socio-economic development or United Nations reform, still confound us.

Today, we have as the foundation of our global society the principles enshrined in the United Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. We also have the obligations arising from the range of international declarations, treaties and conventions that the United Nations has adopted over the years. The challenge, of course, is to give full expression to the principles to which we are committed by the provisions of these documents, principles such as equality, tolerance, dignity, social justice, economic development, the peaceful settlement of disputes, and the maintenance of international peace and security.

When we reflect more broadly on the changes that the United Nations and the international community as a whole face in the early years of the twenty-first century, we cannot help but conclude that it is the rapid pace of change, as much as the change itself, that is impacting the organization.

Modern technology is changing the world in ways that would have been unimaginable when the United Nations Charter was signed. Transportation and the information age, in particular, are truly turning our world into a global village. Instantaneous communication, for example, is bringing world events - disasters, human rights violations, crime, war and human suffering - to the very doorstep of people the world over.

Globalization and trade liberalization is proceeding at such a pace that a majority of developing countries, in particular, are having grave difficulties keeping up. Numerous developing countries are also asking themselves where are the improvements in the socio-economic situation that these two developments were to bring. For most, they have simply not materialized. Grave inequalities in the global economic system persist, in too many instances further impoverishing the poor and enriching the rich. The breakdown in trade negotiations in Cancun has certainly not helped at all.

Deadly diseases such as HIV/AIDS threaten to engulf entire countries and regions, unleashing untold suffering, and threatening development gains particularly in Africa, the Caribbean and increasingly in Asia. The promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms, democracy and the rule of law are also issues commanding our attention, as in some instances, they bear fundamentally on the avoidance of war and conflict.

Issues that transcend national boundaries are becoming more increasingly complex and insidious. Transnational organized criminal organizations engaged in activities such as drugs and arms trafficking continue to expand their networks, and have the potential to impact virtually all states. All states - and indeed, even the United Nations - are not immune from international terrorism, as we so ruefully found out in Baghdad, Afghanistan and elsewhere. The international community must answer these grave transgressions.

This year in which I took up the Presidency of the General Assembly was a particularly challenging one for the United Nations. In this year, it became patently clear that no nation acting

alone could solve critical global problems. It has been a year for reiterating compelling questions, such as:

Why, despite global efforts, the number of people afflicted with HIV/AIDS is increasing, and all indicators suggest that the pandemic will get worse, before it is brought under control?

Why is it that in 2002, for the sixth consecutive year, developing countries made a net transfer of financial resources to developed countries?

Why is it that the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO) tells us that the world produces enough food to feed all its inhabitants, yet some 20,000 people die each day from hunger related causes?

How we ask these questions is as important as how we answer them. If indeed we ask them rhetorically, then the hope of addressing the critical problems to which they refer becomes moot. If we answer them honestly, we are on our way to solving problems which make people, countries, particularly developing countries, and indeed the international community as a whole most vulnerable, problems that have continued to manifest themselves this year.

That we needed to find common ground to reach our common objectives was evident from the overwhelming support expressed for the United Nations and for multilateralism, particularly by Heads of State and Government and other high level participants in the September/October General Debate of the Fifty-eighth Session of the United Nations General Assembly.

Heads of State and Government have also sent a clear message on the need to reform the United Nations, including revitalizing and strengthening the General Assembly and reforming the Security Council. Episodically, we have raised the issue of reform of the United Nations, and from time to time have taken important decisions on the matter. Unfortunately, in the case of the General Assembly, we often do not act fully on these decisions.

With the resurgence of interest in, and momentum for, revitalization of the United Nations sole universal forum, we are working assiduously to adopt a resolution on this matter by the middle of this month. The revitalization initiative is centered on building on the General Assembly's strengths, enhancing its authority, role and functioning, and ordering its agenda that it may bring to centre stage development and other critical issues.

I have said in other fora that reform of the Security Council is another, and very difficult matter. Yet, I am mandated by the General Assembly to take up this matter, and hope that notwithstanding the challenges it presents, Member States will seriously turn their attention to it. Our stocktaking efforts are near completion. We will soon present the matter for consideration by Member States of the Assembly. I thought I should also let you know that will be setting up a website shortly, to deal specifically with revitalization and reform.

As you are all aware, the United Nations Secretary General has appointed a panel of eminent persons to examine ways to further strengthen the United Nations, especially in the context of major threats to international peace and security. The panel is to consider possible collective

solutions and response to these threats. Its recommendations will be placed before governments for their consideration when the panel concludes its work.

Civil Society - people who share a sense of commitment to the values espoused by the United Nations in all fields of human endeavour - no doubt has a place in the global approach to the solution of global problems advocated by high-level participants in the General Debate. This, I believe, is in keeping with the United Nations Charter, which clearly identifies "We the People of the United Nations" as contributors to, and beneficiaries of, international cooperation in areas including peace and security, socio-economic development, and the promotion and protection of human rights.

What we have come to call "civil society" and its organizations have, of course, been involved in the work of the United Nations from the outset. Many of the United Nations most successful agencies and programmes have historically benefited from the efforts of organizations such as CONGO. In the last two decades, but especially in the 1990s, the work of civil society has been particularly visible. Constructive contributions have especially been made in the context of United Nations Conferences addressing issues from the environment and sustainable development, to the situation of women and children.

It is notable that conference participation has increasingly come to include representatives from the developing world, allowing them to directly share experiences among themselves. This has served to promote both South/South exchanges, even as North/South exchanges continue, thus strengthening cooperation and understanding at the practical level. Importantly, participation in conferences and other international events has allowed civil society in developing countries to speak for themselves, and for a new and dynamic assessment to be made of their potential to mobilize people in their own countries, where ultimately action must take place.

Let me now share some of my perspectives on the contribution CONGO and civil society in general. A more active civil society is an important development for the United Nations in the work it must do in the twenty-first century. Groups such as CONGO can be a key source of support for the United Nations. CONGO brings together people from all over the world, each of whom in turn is linked to hundreds more people through organizational networks and communities.

I believe that civil society, including organizations such as CONGO, helps to extend the reach of the United Nations. They bring into focus issues of concern to people, encourage people to work in their own interest and raise the consciousness of people in respect of decisions taken, and work done in their behalf, at the United Nations.

Civil society can help to shape the Agenda and formulate the strategies the United Nations adopts in critical areas of international concern, including in key technical areas. I recall, in that regard, the important role that civil society played in the formulation and adoption of the Monterrey Consensus, adopted by the International Conference on Financing for Development, Convened in Monterrey Mexico in 2001.

I must say that civil society organizations distinguished themselves in continuing the partnership as major stakeholders with Governments, the International Financial Institutions and other Agencies in the High-level Dialogue on Financing for Development, convened by the United Nations General Assembly 29-30 October 2003. The Dialogue and its related panel discussions and interactive sessions were enriched by the frank and forthright manner in which civil society representatives addressed the issues. Their inputs are receiving due consideration, in follow-up strategies of the General Assembly on financing for development.

Civil society representatives also played a specific role in the High-level Plenary on HIV/AIDS, convened by the General Assembly in September of this year. With commitment and competence, they made their essential contribution to the development of efforts to halt and reverse this deadly disease, in keeping with the commitments made in the Special Session on HIV/AIDS and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). On this note, let me commend CONGO on its decision to establish a committee on HIV/AIDS.

There was a time, earlier this year, when in the aftermath of the military action in Iraq, some were questioning the relevance of the United Nations. I am pleased to say that such sentiments are fading in light of developments since then. Civil society continues to be a vital and powerful intermediary between the United Nations and public opinion - bringing the urgent concerns of the global public to the United Nations and taking back to that public the sense of what is being done to meet those concerns. I believe it safe to say in this vein, that civil society organizations such as CONGO would have mobilized their constituencies in support of the United Nations in that particularly trying time, and continue to do so.

Civil society also contributes towards United Nations efforts to keep its commitments and Member States to meet their obligations to the world's people, obligations that are embodied in international treaties and conventions. Whether through focused public attention, mobilization of resources or helping to transform resources into action, civil society can and does play its part.

Importantly, civil society can help build strong support for negotiated settlements, oftentimes in seemingly intractable situations. Where there efforts impartially support consensus building on the issues, civil society's opinions on the policy issues and options could be quite pivotal.

I am well aware that for CONGO and most non-governmental organizations, your consultative status is with the Economic and Social Council. No conclusion has been brought to the matter of consultative status with the General Assembly. I know that the United Nations is challenged by the significant numbers of civil society groups, including non-governmental organizations, that want to participate and the matter of the quality of participation has also been raised. As you know, the Secretary-General felt that some stocktaking was in order, and appointed a panel of eminent persons to study the United Nations - civil society relationship in all its aspects. That panel, chaired by former President of Brazil, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, is expected to report early next year.

The observations I have made are to indicate that civil society does come to the place for partners at the table of international affairs. Their partnership with the United Nations has been strengthened over the past decade or more, with very good results overall.

Speaking of asking and answering questions, let me conclude by asking and answering two. Where does the United Nations need the support of civil society in its work? My view is that constructive contributions are needed in every aspect of the organization's work.

The second question is; "How can civil society best deliver that support?" In my view, it can do so by continuing to use the expertise and energy of its representatives to impact policy making processes, whether through United Nations Conferences, consultative status with the Economic and Social Council and other agencies, in the Security Council debate under the "Arria formula" or simply in informal discussions.

The objective should always be, as I am sure it is, contributing towards making the United Nations more relevant, more effective, and better able to fulfill the principles and purposes of the Charter, no matter what the change, no matter what the challenge.

Thank you.