

8 September 2004

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Julian Robert Hunte,
President of the 58th Session of the General Assembly,
at the 57th Annual Conference of Non-governmental Organizations
(NGOs) Associated with the United Nations Department of Public
Information (DPI)**

Mr. Under-Secretary-General, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ms Shirin Ebadi, human rights activist and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate 2003, Representatives of Non-governmental Organizations, Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am honoured to address this opening session of the Fifty-seventh Annual Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations associated with the United Nations Department of Public Information.

This Conference has set an impressive and timely task for itself, in adopting as its theme, Millennium Development Goals: Civil Society Takes Action. That task is to determine how civil society might further direct and order its initiatives to accord with the specific courses of action Heads of Government, meeting in their largest gathering ever, set out in their 2000 Millennium Declaration. The undertakings made in the Declaration now finds expression in the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), an essential part of the United Nations development agenda, which accords with the ideals of the United Nations Charter.

The MDGs are the blocks with which the international community can build, to eradicate poverty and hunger, achieve universal education, promote gender equality, improve maternal health and reduce child mortality, combat deadly disease, including HIV/AIDS, promote sustainable development, and develop partnerships for these purposes. How well we build will be determined by political will and by the effectiveness of our cooperative and collaborative efforts.

International cooperation and collaboration of the nature we seek to foster - and which is key to upholding the ideals and objectives of the United Nations Charter and delivering on the MDGs - requires partnerships. This point is emphasized here because the accounting of the implementation of the MDGs to date is far from encouraging. Much of what needs to be achieved still remains in the realm of intentions and commitments, rather than in the realm of accomplishments. An enormous amount of work must be done to right our balance sheet, if we are to meet the targets, including those for 2015 and beyond. We must take up the hard issues, and ask the difficult questions, even when there are no easy answers.

Increasingly, the United Nations is partnering with Non-governmental organizations, and these partnerships are proving to be mutually beneficial. They extend the global reach of the United Nations. They help raise public awareness of issues before the United Nations, and ensure that

such issues are clearly understood. They bring particular expertise and experience to bear on policy setting and the implementation of courses of action agreed by the United Nations, and assist in channeling resources to where they are most needed. Importantly, they positively influence public opinion towards the United Nations by carrying the message of what the organization is doing to improve the lives of the world's peoples.

The Fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly gained much from the participation of Non-governmental organizations and civil society, particularly in its development work. From the follow-up to the International Conference on Financing for Development and the High-level Plenary on HIV/AIDS to informal hearings on issues such as the role of the business sector, commodities and tax cooperation, non-governmental organizations and civil society made important contributions to our collective efforts to effectively address pressing global issues.

We need to maintain the momentum towards meaningful partnership, as challenges to the international community continue unabated. There is, for example, considerable scope for non-governmental organizations and civil society to contribute towards the successful convening of the high-level plenary the General Assembly will hold in 2005, during its Sixtieth Anniversary.

As is well known, the high-level plenary will review follow-up and implementation of the outcomes of more than a decade of United Nations summits and conferences in the economic and social fields, the MDGs, and other matters addressed in the Millennium Declaration. Non-governmental organizations and civil society organizations were participants in all these gatherings; they also have a vested interest in ensuring that the commitments made in these meetings are kept, in the interest of advancing the United Nations development agenda including the MDGs, and addressing other issues for the maintenance of peace and security in our world.

It is also expected that non-governmental organizations and civil society will play their part in respect of other follow-up activities of the General Assembly. Two activities of note are the follow-up to the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS to be convened in June 2005 and the ten-year review of the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States (SIDS), scheduled to be held in Mauritius in January 2005.

Even as we build partnerships with NGOs and civil society, a case continues to be made for greater involvement of non-governmental organizations in the work of the General Assembly. Our world is rapidly changing, and the United Nations, including the General Assembly, must continue to change with it.

The process of revitalization of the General Assembly has been significantly advanced during this Fifty-eighth session, both in terms of strengthening its role and authority as well as its working methods. The matters, which the Cardoso Panel on United Nations-Civil Society relations took up, and on which it has now reported, can indeed be considered in the context of the General Assembly revitalization processes. The Assembly will no doubt speak to these issues directly in determining how it might optimally build partnerships with non-governmental organizations when it takes up the Cardoso report during its Fifty-ninth session.

Representatives of non-governmental organizations, your participation in significant numbers in this conference makes a strong statement about your commitment to the MDGs. Moreover, it underscores your determination to take action, in partnership with the United Nations, to overcome obstacles and to achieve the MDGs, to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedoms.

I wish to convey his best wishes for a successful and proactive conference, and commend you for your energy, dedication and commitment in working together with the United Nations to uphold the letter and spirit of the Charter.

I thank you.