



## *International Advocacy Reports and Statements*

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Speech of Françoise Sauvage to the  
Committee on NGOs of the UNESCO Executive Board  
September 2009

Mr President  
Mr Representative of the Director General,  
Distinguished Delegates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour to share this podium today and to reflect a few minutes, Mr Ambassador, on what your efforts to revitalize the NGO Committee of the UNESCO Executive Board have meant to me and my team on the NGO/UNESCO Liaison Committee.

The relations between UNESCO and NGOs have a long history, which I will not review here, but I would like to highlight the period that preceded this revitalisation and was devoted to the implementation of the directives adopted by the General Conference at its 28th, 20th and 30th sessions.

This was a delicate period, a difficult one for many NGOs, in certain cases involving a change in status with some ensuing frustrations. The Liaison Committee at the time, and most particularly its President, Monique Fouilhoux, had to act with authority and diplomacy to implement the new directives in perfect harmony with the Secretariat, especially the NGO section. They were able to preserve that which is the strength of NGOs - a real independence vis-à-vis the Organisation, great liberty of thinking and of expression, and collective action.

It is this that prepared and enabled us to participate fully in the efforts to revitalize the NGO Committee of the Executive Board. The moment had also arrived for NGOs.

During the course of these last six years and throughout the time of your presidency some major events have occurred, which I would like to review rapidly:

**Preparation of the sexennial report presented to the General Conference in 2007:** The recommendations drawn together by the Drafting Committee under

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the efficient leadership of Madame Levasseur, which I recommend highly that you reread, defined perfectly the magnitude of tasks to be implemented in order to achieve the culture of partnership that was at the heart of the report. Certain of these have already been realized. For example, the round tables and forums included in the programme of this Committee over the last biennium have taken a very varied thematic approach, one adapted to current priorities. The participation of NGOs has been significant. These sessions brought to light common perspectives, but also certain divergent views on the actual implementation of the actions called for by UNESCO. Considerable effort is still needed for NGOs to be part of the decentralization movement and in defining the policies and priorities of UNESCO.

The role and resources accorded to the focal points established in each of UNESCO's sectors have facilitated relationships, but nonetheless have yet to make more tangible the contribution of NGOs to the setting of UNESCO's policy.

In 2005, the Liaison Committee was privileged to meet with the representatives of the UN Secretary General charged with preparing the report on civil society, known as the Caruso Report. They were appreciative of the state of cooperation between UNESCO and NGOs and took this into account in the final drafting of their report. The recommendations of the sexennial report are perfectly in synch with the United Nations reform, but in the area of decentralization and the role of national and regional NGOs accredited to UNESCO, there is still a long way to go. We need the support of Member States and National Commissions to succeed.

#### **International Forum of Civil Society held 25 October 2007:**

This forum brought the principal partners of the Organisation together for the first time in the context of the General Conference. It was followed soon after by the Youth Forum. On this occasion, Mr Matsuura reminded us that "In an ever-changing world, where the interaction between problems calls for collective and supportive responses, it is only reasonable that citizens, 'civil society' in the widest sense of the word, should play an active and increasing role in public affairs." This is, I believe, what we are trying to do here.

Hubert Védrine, previously French Minister of Foreign Affairs, said « We reach today a moment of maturity that supposes that we define the methods of acting together based on the following principles : legitimate and responsible governments have a *de facto* or *de jure* representativity, but they no longer have a monopoly. Civil society represents a considerable social, intellectual, political and idealistic force, but cannot pretend to substitute for governments. It is a complementary relationship that we must seek. » The day ended with the adoption of document affirming the crucial importance of partnerships and

alliances to obtaining the primary objectives defined in the Medium-Term Strategy 2008-2013.

The revitalization of this Committee should encourage NGOs to make greater efforts to align themselves more closely with UNESCO's priorities. However, I shall leave it to Bernard Loing, NGO President, to speak of this in a few moments.

If, as it should, this culture of partnership continues to develop by including partners other than NGOs within an enlarged definition of civil society, it is nonetheless evident that NGOs remain privileged partners, as the very existence and importance of this Committee under your presidency, Mr Ambassador, shows. I hope that you will be able to transmit to your successor the flame and enthusiasm that you have shown at heart of this cooperation. I thank you.

Françoise Sauvage  
IFUW Representative to UNESCO