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## NGO Problems Attending UN Meeting

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Dear People

As you all know, life has never been easy for NGOs who care about and work alongside the UN. But these days, things are becoming even more difficult. Here's another story from the frontlines.

On receiving around 10 invitations to participate in the Launch of the UN ICT Task Force this morning, and having been visited by a member of the new UN Task Force staff regarding the IWTC CD-ROM for rural women to use at telecentres in Africa, I crossed the road to attend.

As an NGO representative, I was ushered to the back row of the upstairs gallery at the ECOSOC chamber. No lighting. Requested a seat further forward so I could read the material about the meeting that I'd brought but was told only the Press could sit in the first three rows (i.e. under the lights.) Went forward anyway. The meeting started and I reached for an ear phone. None there. It was not just a matter of getting speeches interpreted, we could not hear anything in the gallery. I approached the young woman standing guard at the rope barrier. She was sorry about it all and went off to find someone. A senior UN person returned with her and after some whispered consultations decided the Press could move forward to empty seats where there were ear phones, but not NGOs. There's something particularly galling about seeing long-time, steadfast and productive NGO people being told "No, not you," while reporters who are mostly bored silly by it all move forward to be able to hear what's going on.

At this point I left to return to my office and met Lesley Wright, Vice President of CONGO on her way to the meeting and informed her of the problem. Apparently she



was able to move things along a little because I got a phone call at 11.15 to say that ear phones were now being handed out on a one-by-one basis. But the Launch was from 10.00 to 11.15 and there was no point in returning.

Just another NGO incident at the UN, but with all the rhetoric from the UN regarding civil society partnerships, I thought it was worth documenting.

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