NGOs and the UN Capital Master Plan

As the Charter recognizes, civil society organizations are important partners of the United Nations. Over the past sixty-five years they have developed a close relationship with the Organization, working in a variety of areas such as service delivery, policy development, analysis and advocacy. Today thousands of accredited Non-Governmental Organizations work with the UN worldwide, serving as important sources of public information about the UN and bringing fresh information and ideas from the field.

On a typical day, hundreds of NGO representatives enter the UN’s main New York campus. During major conferences, NGO numbers may rise to three or four thousand. NGOs meet with UN officials and attend or sponsor programs, lectures and briefings. They observe and sometimes participate in intergovernmental meetings. They use common facilities such as toilets, elevators, and restaurants. They are library users and club members; they have a Resource Center where they gather, converse, and obtain information; and they reserve or rent meeting rooms. NGO representatives include persons located permanently in New York and those who have come a long distance for special events.

In light of this history of considerable NGO physical presence and space use, the Capital Master Plan should take NGOs into account. CMP should consider NGO needs throughout the campus and especially the need for a new NGO Resource Center. NGOs are concerned that the CMP process has had only minimal direct contact with NGOs in its planning process thus far.

The Working Group on NGO Access suggests that the CMP undertake an inventory of NGO needs and be alert to issues of NGO use and NGO circulation, especially in the context of increasingly-tight security measures. Movement of NGOs through the security perimeter should particularly be taken into account, so that NGOs are assured accelerated inbound screening, separate from the general public. A broad review of NGO concerns should be based on direct consultation with NGOs themselves.

NGOs should have an NGO Resource Center in the complex to address their special needs. Such a facility should be in a convenient and inviting location within the campus, and it should provide for some basic facilities and services including:

- An open area for NGOs to meet together for socializing, networking and small meetings
- Desks for UN staff to provide information services and orientation for visiting NGOs
- Computers for NGO use and document reference
- Desks (or mini-rooms) for the use of the NGO umbrella groups: CONGO and the NGO-DPI Executive Committee
- A coat closet and some shelving for documents
- Peripheral mini-rooms for small meetings, phone/Skype calls, or quiet workspace.

NGOs also require regular access to larger meeting spaces, including the Dag Hammarskjold Library Auditorium, the “Alphabet Rooms,” and other official meeting rooms, as well as digital facilities for virtual meetings and teleconferences with NGO representatives outside New York. NGOs will need continuing access to the library, with access to virtual libraries and databases of the Organization. Technical facilities should take into account the needs of NGOs in remote sites in other countries, particularly those from the developing world. Space allocation policies and procedures should take into account NGO access to common facilities that will be fair, transparent and accountable.