18 January 2011

H.E. Mr. Ban Ki-moon
Secretary-General
United Nations

Excellency:

Since our correspondence with you, dated 30 March 2010, the NGO Working Group on U.N. Access has acted on your suggestion and taken our concerns to officials at the departmental level. We would like to update you on our meetings, inform you about emerging consensus, and call your attention to issues that remain outstanding. We look forward to continued progress in 2011, and we seek your support and leadership in this effort.

Members of the Working Group met with Under-Secretaries-General Sha Zukang on 26 August 2010, Gregory Starr on 9 September 2010, and Kiotaka Akasaka on 8 October 2010, as well as key members of their staff. We outlined the problems we are experiencing and suggested constructive solutions. We also met with the Officer-in-Charge of NGLS, Elisa Peter. At the suggestion of Mr Sha, we developed a written summary of our thinking, including immediate, medium-term and long-term solutions. This proposal is attached for your information. It has been provided to each of the Under-Secretaries-General and to other stakeholders and it has been circulated to the NGO community.

Working Group members have urged the UN to consult meaningfully with NGOs prior to taking decisions that affect NGO accreditation process, access to UN premises, and capacity to participate fully in the work of the organization. We believe that such consultation will contribute to substantially better decisions, by any measure. We have borrowed a phrase from NGOs representing disabled persons: “Nothing about us without us!” We hope that this concept will prompt the Secretariat to genuinely consult with NGOs in the design, implementation and review of all decisions that affect us.

**Improved Understanding, Short-Term Practical Solutions, and Agreement on Principles**

Our meetings with the Under-Secretaries-General led to better understanding on both sides across a wide range of issues. Most importantly, key UN officials heard our concerns and agreed to address them, while we offered our willingness to work cooperatively to find solutions.

The meetings produced a few immediate solutions to practical access issues. Mr Starr was able to speed up NGO security screening at the entrance to UN Headquarters and he has acted to reinstate an NGO-initiated training programme for uniformed security staff. The training will raise awareness amongst the uniformed staff of the role and contribution of NGOs to the work of the UN and it will sensitise them to the diversity and range of needs of members of the international NGO community. We hope that sessions will begin early in the New Year.
Regular, high-level, inter-departmental meetings with NGOs

We were glad that the Under-Secretaries-General acknowledged the systemic nature of many of the problems we raised. In some cases, they were unaware of the changes to policies and procedures that we brought to their attention. They agreed that many problems arose (at least in part) due to the lack of NGO-UN consultation and inter-departmental coordination. They agreed to the principle of a high-level, inter-departmental meeting process that would include NGO representatives. They agreed that such a forum would help to avoid “buck-passing” and responsibility-avoidance between departments, and that it would provide a valuable forum for the negotiation of consensus solutions in advance. There was also agreement that these meetings should take place on a regular basis, perhaps three times annually, though the frequency and duration of the meetings would always be set in proportion to need.

UN accountability to the NGO Community

The Under Secretaries General agreed that the principle of “Nothing About Us Without Us!” should include occasional public meetings between UN officials and the NGO community to review issues of common concern. They acknowledged that the UN can make better policy and work much more effectively with NGOs if it engages in consultation and recognizes the value of cooperation and coordination, in addition to the regular inter-departmental process mentioned above.

We asked for a town-hall style meeting of this kind prior to year-end, so as to get a head-start on issues that will arise in the UN calendar for 2011. No such meeting was convened, however. We realize the need for a UN focal point to convene such meetings and we hope that a meeting will be held soon.

Immediate Proposals for Action

Inter-Departmental Meeting Series We propose that the inter-departmental consultation process get under way immediately. We suggest that NGLS serve as secretariat for this process and we propose that the first meeting take place no later than the end of February. The following departments should be present: DESA, DSS, and DPI. The meetings could perhaps be chaired by the USGs on a rotating basis.

Town-Hall Meeting with NGOs We propose that NGLS convene a town-hall style meeting, in cooperation with the Working Group, during the first quarter of 2011.

Training Process with Uniformed Security to Begin We are hopeful that the agreed-to training process for uniformed security can begin promptly in the new year.

Review of Accreditation Processes We propose that DESA and DPI begin a consultation process with NGOs to review the problem-plagued accreditation process that was recently-promulgated. The Working Group would be glad to take the lead on the NGO side. This should be an opportunity to adjust these processes to better accommodate NGO interests.

Capital Master Plan Process for NGO Input The Capital Master Plan deeply affects NGOs, both in the interim building phase and in the final arrangements. Since there has been no reasonable process of NGO consultation, we urge that a process get under way immediately, with consideration
of both immediate and long-term NGO needs at UN headquarters. A briefing for the NGO community would also be useful in the very near future, not just to inform but to get ideas about NGO needs.

**A Focal Point in the EOSG** Our proposals seek solutions in the absence of a system-wide focal point, but we would like to reaffirm our strong preference for a senior person charged with NGO matters in your Executive Office, based on the excellent precedent set by Assistant Secretary General Gillian Martin Sorensen. Such a focal point need not be at the ASG level, nor would it be necessary that NGO issues would be the sole portfolio of this person. We believe that such an appointment would enable the UN system to respond much more effectively to our needs and concerns and would be a powerful sign of your personal engagement with and commitment to NGOs.

**Conclusion**

The NGO Working Group on U.N Access has been in operation for well over a year. We have a widely representative membership and we are in regular contact with a large number of NGO colleagues, both in New York and in other UN locations. Thus far, the UN has listened to us, and some action has been taken, but substantial responses remain limited. We hope that 2011 will show some real advances, both in substance and in process. We stand ready to work with you and your team in finding constructive and durable solutions to NGO participation at the United Nations.

Yours sincerely,

Liberato C. Bautista, Convenor
President, Conference of Non-Governmental Organisations in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations (CoNGO)

Bani Dugal, Co-Convenor
Principal Representative to the UN, Baha’i International Community

James Paul, Co-Convenor
Executive Director, Global Policy Forum
cc. Mr Kiyotaka Akasaka and Ms Maria-Louisa Chavez
    Mr Gregory Starr and Mr David Bongi
    Mr Sha Zukang and Mr Andrei Abramov
    Ms Elisa Peter