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***Report on the June session of the Council of Europe INGOs,
Strasbourg (France), 25-28 June 2007***

The June session of the International Non Governmental Organisations (INGOs) enjoying participatory status with the Council of Europe was held in Strasbourg from Monday 25 June 2007 to Wednesday 27 June 2007.

A meeting of the Conference of INGOs Liaison Committee took place on Monday 25 June.

The Conference of INGOs met on Tuesday morning 26 June.

The Conference was followed, from Tuesday afternoon 26 June to Wednesday 27 June, by meetings of the various thematic groupings (Health prevention, Health, Education and Culture, Extreme Poverty and Social Cohesion, European Social Charter and Social Policies, etc.) and, on Thursday 28 June, by a Study Day on "*Sects as a threat to Democracy and Human Rights*".

1. Meeting of the Conference of INGOs, 26 June 2007

The conference was chaired by Ms Annelise Oeschger, President of the INGOs Conference.

The agenda and the report of the meeting of 30 January 2007 were adopted.

Oeschger announced the forthcoming publication of "*INGO news OING infos INGO news OING infos*", a semestrial newsletter which will provide up-to-date information on the main working areas of the Conference of INGOs Liaison Committee.

The trial version of this newsletter can be downloaded on the Council of Europe website: http://www.coe.int/t/e/ngo/public/INGO_%20NEWS.doc

She then mentioned the signature on 13 May 2007 of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Council of Europe and the European Union, which

includes a chapter on "Institutional Cooperation" stating that the contribution of civil society will be encouraged. In the same time, several partnerships between the Conference of INGOs and the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly have been initiated.

Hence the need to reorganise the Conference's functioning and the groupings' thematic work, so as to achieve greater transparency and efficiency.

On 8 October 2007, elections for the 8 thematic groupings' respective presidencies should take place. During the Conference it was proposed that the mandate of the outgoing presidents of groupings would be extended until October 2008, which will mark the expected completion of the reform process. The motion was adopted unanimously.

Information on the advancements of the reform process will be published regularly and a specific forum of discussion will be available on a dedicated blog: <http://coliaison.unblog.fr>.

Next, Jean-Claude Gonon, General Rapporteur, provided a precise timetable of the revision process which will lead to the reorganisation of the Conference of INGOs' thematic work. The aim is to improve the thematic work and increase efficiency.

Gonon told the participants that for each theme two persons will be in charge of coordinating the analysis on the revision project and dealing with methodology issues, while the Conference's Vice-President will take care of content related questions.

A first draft should be finalised and submitted to an external observer by the beginning of July 2007, and, based on the opinion of the external observer, a revision project will be produced by the end of July 2007. The project will be discussed and adopted in January 2008, during next meeting of the Conference of INGOs.

An overhaul restructuring process of the work of the Council of Europe is taking place at the same time. The participants pointed out the need for a precise and clear road map detailing tasks and deadlines.

Members of the INGOs Conference can participate, give inputs and post online remarks on the blog dedicated to the reform process: <http://coliaison.unblog.fr>.

The participants were also invited to vote on two specific amendments to the rules of procedure of the Conference of INGOs, Liaison Committee and thematic groupings:

- Article 2 of the proposed rules of procedure of the Liaison Committee and of the thematic groupings, stating that "*The Bureau of the Liaison Committee is composed of the Bureau of the Conference of INGOs*";
- Article 2 of the proposed rules of procedure of the Conference of INGOs, stating that "*The bureau of the Conference of INGOs is composed of the Bureau of the Liaison Committee*".

Both amendments were adopted unanimously.

Next speakers were Jean-Louis Laurent, Director General of Democracy and Political Affairs, and Philip Blair, Director of Democratic Institutions. They presented the new configuration of the Council of Europe's Secretariat. A Direction of Democracy and Political Affairs - Blair being the new Director of this unit - was created to increase

visibility on the Council of Europe's activities in the field of democracy and enhance synergies for the improvement of democracy and good governance.

Christoph Spreng, Project Manager, presented the Recommendation of the Conference of INGOs regarding the elaboration of the White Book on Intercultural Dialogue. A drafting group has been set up under his leadership to finalise the text of the proposed INGOs' contribution on the White Paper by the end of this summer.

Comments and contributions in this respect can be sent to Christoph via E-mail: c.spreng@caux.ch

Taras Poljanec, from the European Action of the Disabled (AEH), and Luc Zelderloo, from the European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities (EASPD), were invited to promote the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of People with Disability and call for an involvement of the Conference of INGOs in the Council of Europe Action Plan to promote the rights and full participation of people with disabilities in society. They insisted on the opposite approaches adopted by these two documents: whereas the UN Convention focuses on rights, the Council of Europe Action Plan sets an agenda of actions to undertake in different areas for the coming 10 years. They are, however, complementary and express a shift of paradigm, the transition from a medical model of disability to a social model, from a patient oriented model to a model where disabled people are considered as full citizens.

Next meeting of the Conference of INGOs will take place in **January 2008**.

For more information on the Conference of INGOs and this meeting: the Council of Europe website, <http://www.coe.int/T/E/NGO/Public/>

2. Meeting of the Media and Human Rights Grouping, 26 June 2007

The meeting was chaired by Gabriel Nissim, President of the Media and Human Rights Grouping.

A first point on the agenda was the presentation of the "*Declaration on Media and Democracy in Europe*", which was drafted by the Coalition for Media Freedom and Integrity. Members of the Coalition include: the European Federation of Journalists, the Open Society Institute – Network Media Program, MiraMedia, Signis, the European Women's Lobby, Online/More Colour in the Media (OL/MCM), Article 19 and the Community Media Forum Europe.

Through this declaration, the Coalition call on lawmakers, public authorities, media owners, media professionals' organisations, civil society groups and all other interested parties to act urgently to strengthen the liberty, quality, variety and integrity of mass media and journalism in Europe.

The text is now open to signature on:

<http://www.gopetition.com/petitions/declaration-on-media-and-democracy-in-europe.html>

Gabriel Nissim invited the participants to sign the petition and circulate the information in their respective networks.

He gave some information on the activities of the Council of Europe regarding the MEDIA Programme. Some working groups have been set up to work more in depth on the issue:

- the first working group deals with "Media in a plural society and role of the media in a multicultural society";
- the second one is in charge of "Human rights and information society".

The Council of Europe will be represented at the next UN Global Forum on Internet Governance.

Next conference of the ministers in charge of information and media will be held in May 2009. The preparations have already started. Ideas about the agenda and theme of the conference, which have not been decided yet, can be sent by E-mail to Gabriel at gabriel.nissim@wanadoo.fr

For more information on this Grouping and the meeting: the Council of Europe website,

http://www.coe.int/t/e/ngo/public/groupings/Human_rights/index.asp#TopOfPage

3. Meeting of the Health Grouping, 26 June 2007

The meeting was chaired by Irene Donadio, Vice-President of the Grouping.

Irene presented the outcomes of the CDSP (European Health Committee) meeting which took place in Strasburg on 5 June 2007. During the meeting, participants debated on the European Forum of Coordination for an Action Plan of the Council of Europe for Disabled People.

To read the report of this meeting:

http://www.coe.int/t/e/ngo/public/groupings/health/documents/2007/08_ReportCDS_P5June2007_en.asp#TopOfPage

Irene reminded the participants to fill in the INGO Experts Criteria and Reporting Form. This questionnaire aims at selecting a representative of the Health Grouping for attendance and participation in other meetings of the Council of Europe, such as meetings of the Steering Committees.

Luc Zelderloo, from EASPD, summarised the objectives of the Memorandum of Understanding Stakeholder Approach endorsed by the Health Grouping in January 2006 *"to develop a stakeholder approach taking into account the perspective of service providers and target groups/beneficiaries*. The main goal is to produce a

standard form to collect good practices on how to better organise cooperation between the different stakeholders, so as to provide input to public authorities responsible for the development of health and social policies. The Liaison Committee and the Conference of INGOs will be invited to adopt this Memorandum.

A template for the collection of good practices has been prepared by EASPD.

The deadline for answering the questionnaire is the **end of September 2007**.

For more information on the Memorandum of Understanding:

http://www.coe.int/t/e/ngo/public/groupings/health/documents/2007/07_finalMemo_Understanding_Stakeholder_en.asp#TopOfPage

Irene talked about the restructuring and future of the Health Grouping. She underlined:

- the need for increased efficiency;
- the need to consider governance of the whole organisation: Bureau, Liaison Committee, etc.;
- the need for cooperation with other important players of the health field at international level: WHO, European Commission, civil society, etc.;
- the need to set priorities;
- the need to guarantee the sustainability and accountability of the Conference of INGOs;
- the possibility of a melting of the Health Grouping with the Social Cohesion and Family Grouping.

The meeting ended with a presentation on the Task Force on Maternity and Child Health. The Health Grouping contributed to the report written by Christine Mc Cafferty, titled "*Recommendations on the strategy to promote SRHR and sexuality education*". The Grouping also contributed to the Council of Europe Draft Convention Against Child Sexual Abuse.

For more information on this meeting and the Health Grouping: the Council of Europe website,

http://www.coe.int/t/e/ngo/public/groupings/health/documents/2007/06_OING_S_2_007_OJ3_en.asp#TopOfPage

4. Meeting of the Extreme Poverty and Social Cohesion Grouping, 27 June 2007

The meeting was co-chaired by Maritchu Rall, President of the Grouping, and Jean-Pierre Golle, Vice-President.

It consisted in two parts:

1. a session solely dedicated to extreme poverty and social cohesion,
2. a joint meeting with the European Social Charter and Social Policies Grouping.

First Part:

After adoption of the agenda and report of the meeting held in January 2007, Jean-Pierre introduced the Memorandum on the contribution of NGOs to the fight against poverty in Europe. The text is based on two international studies on poverty in Europe and on the work of NGOs. Different themes are approached: youth and family poverty, women poverty, migrants and poverty, disabled persons and poverty, the contribution of NGOs, etc. The Memorandum should be finalised and circulated this summer.

Michel Knoel, Director of CRESUS Alsace, made an inspiring presentation on ethical and solidarity-based initiatives. He talked about the CRESUS association and its role in assisting families facing over-indebtedness and economic exclusion. Since June 2006, the work of the association is undertaken under the patronage of the Council of Europe, in the framework of a Multipartite Social Contract.

The participation of interested NGOs in one of the Committees of Experts set up by the European Committee for Social Cohesion was then debated:

- The Committee on improving the situation of low income workers will meet on 28-29 June 2007 to identify measures which could be implemented to prevent workers from falling into poverty and elaborate guidelines on the improvement of the workers' situation. Another meeting is planned for 16-17 July 2007.
- The Committee on empowerment of the most deprived people will meet on 5-6 July and 15-16 November 2007. The objective is to identify some innovating approaches for the adoption of original policies on the empowerment of the most deprived people.
- The Committee on family and childhood policies (successor to that on family) will hold its first meeting on 20-21 June 2007 and another one in December 2007. The Committee will run until December 2008.

Last point on the agenda was the preparations for the elections of the President and Vice-President of the Grouping. Jean-Pierre Golle and Maritchu Rall announced that they will not be candidates for another mandate. However, they accepted the extension of their mandate from October 2007 to October 2008.

The World Day to overcome Poverty will take place on 17 October 2007. This year marks the 10th anniversary of the event. A ceremony will take place at the Council of Europe, with the participation of the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights and Deputy Secretary General.

Second Part:

A discussion on the Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights adopted in Geneva in 2006 by the UN Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights took place.

For more information on the Guiding Principles:

<http://www.un.org/Docs/journal/asp/ws.asp?m=A/HRC/SUB.1/58/L.11>

Members of both Groupings (Extreme Poverty and Social Cohesion and European Social Charter and Social Policies) wish to offer their support to the project. They are preparing a Joint Memorandum which will be sent to the UN Commissioner on Human Rights.

There is currently no international instrument on the fight against poverty. These Guiding Principles could be seen as a first step towards the adoption of a proper international treaty, as well as a European instrument - in the frame of the Council of Europe.

Gilda Farrell, Chief of the Council of Europe Division on Social Cohesion, was also invited by the UN Commissioner on Human Rights to give her opinion on the Guiding Principles.

The Joint Memorandum will be sent to the Commissioner before September 2007.

For more information on this meeting and on the Extreme Poverty and Social Cohesion Grouping: the Council of Europe website,

http://www.coe.int/t/e/ngo/public/groupings/Extreme_poverty_&_social_cohesion/index.asp#TopOfPage

3. Meeting of the European Social Charter and Social Policies Grouping, 27 June 2007

The meeting was co-chaired by Jean-Marie Heydt, President of the Grouping, and Marie-José Schmitt, Vice-President.

The meeting was mainly dedicated to the reports on the application of the European Social Charter submitted by States to the European Committee of Social Rights (ECSR). The ECSR is in charge of judging the conformity of national law and practice with the European Social Charter.

The European Social Charter and Social Policies Grouping accepted the invitation of the ECSR to offer comments and contributions on the implementation of the Charter by the States. It means concretely: to read the State reports, compare their content with the situation in the field and assess whether national law and practice are in line with the Charter.

This reporting activity should also take into account the new reporting system which will be effective as from 31 October 2007.

Whereas they were previously presenting an annual report on the whole provisions of the Charter, States will now report annually on a part of the provisions of the Charter, the provisions having been divided into four thematic groups. In this way, each provision of the Charter will be reported on once every four years. The four groups of provisions shall be composed as follows:

- 2007 (Group 1): Employment, training, equal opportunities;

- 2008 (Group 2): Health, social security and social protection;
- 2009 (Group 3): Labour rights;
- 2010 (Group 4): Children, families and migrants.

More particularly, for this year (2007) the presentation of reports will focus on:

- Article 1: Right to work, vocational guidance, training and rehabilitation;
- Articles 9 and 10: Right to vocational guidance and training;
- Article 15: Right of persons with disabilities to independence, social integration and participation in the life of the community;
- Article 18: Right to engage in a gainful occupation in the territory of other Parties;
- Article 20: Right to equal opportunities and equal treatment in matters of employment and occupation without discrimination on the grounds of sex;
- Article 24: Right to protection in cases of termination of employment;
- Article 25: Right of workers to the protection of their claims in the event of the insolvency of their employer.

NGOs willing to participate in this monitoring initiative should choose one article in particular – where they have a specific interest and/or linked to their main activities and fields of competence -, look at the parts of the State reports which relate to the selected article and answer the questions of the ECSR regarding national implementation.

Questions of the ECSR are precisely stated in a specific form posted on the Council of Europe website:

http://www.coe.int/t/e/human_rights/esc/3_reporting_procedure/1_State_Reports/default.asp#TopOfPage

The next reports should reach the Council of Europe before **31 October 2007**.

Up to November 2007, organisations interested in taking part in this initiative should start to regularly check the Council of Europe website to see which reports have been published and forward them to their member associations, depending on the language of the reports. These national member organisations should provide them some feedback on the implementation of the selected article in their respective countries.

All comments and contributions should be sent to the President of the European Social Charter and Social Policies Grouping before next meeting of the Grouping, in January 2008.

The ECSR will examine the reports and decide whether or not the situations in the countries are in conformity with the European Social Charter. Its conclusions have to be adopted before June 2008.

Follow-up of these conclusions is performed by the Committee of Ministers, who is entitled to address a recommendation to the States that do not envisage remedying a violation and taking action on a decision of non-compliance. A recommendation calls on the State concerned to take appropriate measures to remedy the situation.

Participants also learned that the collective complaint lodged by ATD 4th World and FEANTSA is still pending. The complaint was registered on 2 November 2006. It

relates to Article 31 (right to housing) of the Revised European Social Charter. It is alleged that the manner in which legislation related to housing is implemented in France results in a situation of non conformity with this article.

A public hearing will take place on 17 September 2007.

For more information on this meeting and on the European Social Charter and Social Policies Grouping: the Council of Europe website,

<http://www.coe.int/t/e/ngo/public/groupings/European%5FSocial%5FCharter%5F%26%5FSocial%5FPolicies/>

Fanny Muller, MHE Information Officer and Coordinator of the MHE Committee on Human Rights and Mental Health, took part in the various meetings.

Fanny Muller, 20 July 2007