



CONFERENCE OF INGOs
OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

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CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

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**Opinion of the Conference of INGOs of the
Council of Europe**

**on Recommendation 1893(2009)
of the Parliamentary Assembly on the future
of the European Centre for Global Interdependence
and Solidarity (North-South Centre) and the
proposed new Statutory Resolution
on the North-South Centre**

Adopted by the Standing Committee on 28 April 2010

Rapporteur:

**Catherine Sophie Dimitroulias, Member of the Bureau of the Conference of INGOs,
responsible for the North-South Group of the Europe and Global Challenges Transversal
Group**

1. On 24 February 2010, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe invited the Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe to give its opinion on Recommendation 1893 (2009) of the Parliamentary Assembly on the future of the European Centre for Global Interdependence and Solidarity (North-South Centre) and its related proposal for a new Statutory Resolution to update the corresponding Resolution (93) 51.

2. The Conference of INGOs accordingly launched an internal consultation procedure. This opinion is a summary of the contributions of the International Non-Governmental Organisations enjoying participatory status with the Council of Europe which are members of the Conference of INGOs. It was approved by the Europe and Global Challenges Transversal Group of the Conference of INGOs meeting on 26 April 2010, and was adopted by the Standing Committee of the Conference of INGOs on 28 April 2010.

3. The Conference of INGOs welcomes the decision of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to initiate a consultation procedure under which the Conference of INGOs can fully exercise its prerogatives within the Organisation's institutional quadrilogue and transmit the contribution of civil society to the substantive debate on the future of the North-South Centre.

4. The Conference of INGOs welcomes the initiative by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe to launch this debate with its Recommendation 1883 (2009), and voices its support for the proposal to adopt a new Statutory Resolution to reaffirm the importance and relevance of the North-South Centre and to extend this Resolution to all Council of Europe member states. The Conference of INGOs approves the proposal for the North-South Centre to operate as an enlarged agreement to be managed autonomously as an institution set up by the Council of Europe. It asks the Committee of Ministers to ensure that all member states of the Organisation participate fully and provide effective support for the activities of the North-South Centre by all the necessary means, including funding.

5. The Conference of INGOs considers that in view of the serious and complex challenges of globalisation, which, coinciding as they are with a world economic crisis, are posing a serious threat to the universal, fundamental values and rights which are vital for the European democratic identity, the Council of Europe is facing a challenge with which it has never before been confronted, namely that of safeguarding, promoting and defending these fundamental values and rights which are its very foundations against all attacks or attempts to sacrifice them to considerations of urgency or expediency. Under the current conditions of global interdependence, the Council of Europe must take up this challenge by reinforcing its field of action and broadening it by opening up to dialogue, partnership and sharing of universal values with Europe's neighbouring countries, particularly those in the South, as well as with the rest of the world.

6. Accordingly, it is vital to reaffirm the *raison d'être* and added value of the North-South Centre, which endeavours to promote universal respect for the Council of Europe's fundamental values and rights by reinforcing dialogue and co-operation between Europe, its neighbouring regions and the rest of the world. Consequently, respect for universal freedoms and human rights, democracy and the rule of law, which are enshrined in European and international treaties, especially the European Convention for the Safeguard of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, are the *sine qua non* condition for "dialogue and co-operation between the Council of Europe and non-European countries or regions". The Conference of INGOs calls on the Committee of Ministers to clarify these "values shared by all" in the new Statutory Resolution by affirming the universality, indivisibility and interdependence of human rights. The

commitment to respect and promote, in law and in practice, all the universal freedoms and human rights of all individuals in accordance with international law must be highlighted as the criterion for the accession and continued membership of any State wishing to be a member of the North-South Centre, as well as for the participation of any player wishing to become involved in the Centre's activities.

7. To this end, it is equally crucial to encourage the participation of all Council of Europe member states and quadrilogue bodies. The Conference of INGOs welcomes the founding principle of the North-South Centre, which lies in the quadrilogue, and its function of helping "maintain and further enhance a process of quadripartite communication and co-operation between parliamentarians, governments, non-governmental organisations ("NGOs") and local and regional authorities". The Conference of INGOs in particular welcomes the reaffirmed goal of "strengthen(ing) co-operation and contacts between NGOs from the North and South, active in promoting a better understanding of interdependence and in pursuing solidarity in their various dimensions and issue areas".

8. In this spirit, civil society as represented in all its diversity within the Conference of INGOs affirms as a "political priority", "promoting awareness of solidarity in the framework of global interdependence, especially between Europe and its southern neighbours". Solidarity is the bedrock of the future orientations of the Conference of INGOs in promoting the Council of Europe's values: peace, democracy, inalienable and in dissociable human rights, including gender equality, the rule of law, social cohesion, education and culture and sustainable development.

9. Solidarity is constantly proclaimed in the continuing pioneering work of the Conference of INGOs, notably in the field of North-South relations, helped along by the experience on the ground and the energies of its constituent civil society organisations. No one can overlook the unique role played by civil society in everyday defence against violations of human dignity and human rights, creating a chain of human solidarity that transcends borders and unites continents. Civil society is thus recognised as a major player in the international community and a vital partner for the public authorities and the States.

10. "The strengthening of and co-operation with civil society at a global level is an essential part of the Council of Europe's remit: to defend human rights, democracy and the rule of law and to promote awareness of a European identity based on shared universal values and rights, cutting across different cultures". This was the framework for the co-operation agreement concluded between the Conference of INGOs and the North-South Centre on 27 January 2010, geared to reinforcing the existing partnership and mutual support in order to promote solidarity policies in conformity with the goals and principles of the Council of Europe. The Conference of INGOs reaffirms its unreserved support for this common goal. The Conference of INGOs will evaluate the efforts and results with regard to the implementation of this co-operation agreement.

11. The Conference of INGOs and the North-South Centre undertook, on the basis of this agreement, "to work together to promote active partnership with independent civil society in the North and South and its active participation in the main lines of action of the North-South Centre and its programme of activities, not least in key areas of mutual interest such as global education, gender equality, combating poverty and social exclusion, youth, intercultural dialogue, Euro-Mediterranean and Euro-African co-operation, etc." The Conference of INGOs welcomes these ambitious goals, which are the North-South Centre's political priorities. It calls on the Committee of Ministers to include these objectives on its long-term agenda so that the

new Statutory Resolution can bring the Centre's current mission into line with the Council of Europe's strategic and political priorities, particularly in the field of co-operation with non-European regions and countries.

12. The Conference of INGOs nevertheless notes that the proposed Statutory Resolution fails to include gender equality among the Centre's priorities, even though this is a universal value and a fundamental right essential to the European democratic identity. The Conference of INGOs recalls that equality between women and men is a preeminent and transversal objective of the international community in all its activities which must be respected by all its stakeholders by virtue of international and European treaties. As a fundamental right, it is a sine qua non for "intercultural dialogue" and must not be made subject to such dialogue. The Conference of INGOs calls on the Committee of Ministers to remedy this serious omission from the new Statutory Resolution by proclaiming gender equality in all fields and the elimination of inequality and violence suffered by women as one of the Centre's transversal objectives and functions.

13. The Conference of INGOs also notes that at this historic time of reform of the North-South Centre, the procedures for representation set out in the proposed Statutory Resolution by no means comply with the principle of the Council of Europe's quadrilogue. The Conference of INGOs, as a Council of Europe quadrilogue body institutionally represented in the bodies of the Centre, only has two seats in the 27-strong membership of the Centre's Executive Council. The Conference of INGOs asks the Committee of Ministers to assign the Conference of INGOs at least three seats on the Executive Council of the North-South Centre, ie half the seats assigned, as is the case for the Parliamentary Assembly and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe.

14. Lastly, the Conference of INGOs notes that, in future, there is no provision for consulting neither the elected representatives of the Parliamentary Assembly and of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities nor civil society as represented by the Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe in the Centre, given that the new Statutory Resolution lays down that "other States may be invited to accede to the Centre by a decision of the Committee of Ministers taken by the majority provided for in Article 20.d of the Statute of the Council of Europe". The Conference of INGOs urges the Committee of Ministers to confer consultative rights on the Parliamentary Assembly, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and the Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe in the context of the procedure for examining the accession of States to the North-South Centre and to specify the criteria for such accession.

15. The Conference of INGOs thanks the Committee of Ministers for its attention to this opinion from civil society. It voices the hope that the reform of the North-South Centre will be a symbol for a new era of peace, friendship and dialogue, under the auspices of the Council of Europe, the European Union and the United Nations, which are grounded on the affirmation of and respect for the universal and indivisible fundamental rights that are vital for our common humanity and for the existence of an independent civil society which must be accessible by everyone.

The credibility of Europe in the eyes of its citizens and the rest of the world is at stake here.