

## Historic 61st Annual DPI/NGO Conference opens in Paris

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The **61st Annual DPI/NGO Conference** opened today at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris, of special significance as the first time in the sixty year history of the conference that it is meeting outside of UN Headquarters in New York. [[webcast](#)]

It is particularly fitting and symbolic that the 2008 conference, whose theme is "Reaffirming human rights for all", is taking place in Paris, as 2008 marks the 60th anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the General Assembly on 10 December 1948 in the city's Palais de Chaillot.

More than 2,000 NGOs (non-governmental organizations) and other civil society partners from 90 countries are attending the three-day event, which runs through 5 September and was organized in collaboration with the **DPI/NGO** Executive Committee; the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (**UNESCO**); the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (**OHCHR**); and the Government of France.

In a video message welcoming participants, Secretary-General BAN Ki-moon said that "often, it is the people who know least about their rights who need them most," and "non-governmental organizations and civil society in general are uniquely placed to promote human rights at the grass-roots level."

2008 is also the International Year of Languages and delivering his speech in French with translation into English, Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information Kiyoo Akasaka opened the 2008 Conference saying that its aim is clear, that "we should like to reach out and engage a larger range of NGOs, which should represent all parts of the world." The DPI head said that even before exact attendance statistics are available, he "could stress that the geographic representation is much better than in past years." He continued, "There are many more Europeans, as expected, but there are also more representatives from Africa and from Asia."

In addition to the Secretary-General, Srgjan Kerim, President of the 62nd Session of the General Assembly provided a video message. Koïchiro Matsuura, UNESCO Director General and Bacre Ndiaye, Director of OHCHR's Division of Human Rights Council and Treaties also addressed the gathering. Simone Veil, human rights advocate and former French Minister of State delivered the keynote address.

The conference boasts a wide array of exhibits, workshops, round tables, and break-out sessions over the three days, a small number of which are listed here. The conference web site contains a complete list.

- Addressing gross human rights violations: prevention and accountability
- The human right to food: solution elements from multiple sources
- Rights of persons with disabilities: from exception to equality
- Upholding the Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- Water as a human right and universal common good
- Women's rights – Violence against women and cultural heritage
- Yogyakarta principles: human rights, gender identity and sexual orientation

The annual conferences provide an excellent opportunity to foster communication and dialogue among the various partners and stakeholders, but are only part of the year-round interaction that takes place, including regular NGO briefings, exhibits, programmes, and special events. DPI's Chief of NGO Relations is María-Luisa Chávez, who assumed this capacity in April. NGO Relations is part of the Outreach Division, headed by Eric Falt, who is also participating as a moderator at the conference.

Planning and organizing the conferences involve the work of UN and NGO staff, interns and volunteers.

For the 2008 Conference, a number of Member States delegations are in attendance. Because of the desire to engage a wider range of NGOs, and due to Capital Master Plan (CMP) contingencies in New York, other Member States are being approached as sites for future conferences.

The broad theme of the 2009 Conference, the site for which has not yet been determined, is disarmament.