SPSSI has consultative status to the United Nations (UN) in New York, Geneva, and Vienna. SPSSI is also a member of the Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations (CONGO). CONGO is the privileged NGO body for consultation of the UN with civil society and coordinates the work of its NGO members at all UN sites.

During June 29-30, 2006, CONGO and its traditional partners organized a Civil Society Forum in Geneva prior to the meeting of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). The High-Level Segment took place at the United Nations in Geneva from July 3-5, 2006. More than 400 NGOs from all over the world participated in the Forum.

The Forum assisted NGOs, in consultation with the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and other civil society organizations, in influencing the dignitaries' deliberations at the ECOSOC High-level Segment meeting on the theme:

"Creating an environment at the national and international levels conducive to generating full and productive employment and decent work for all..."

The forum was launched with a keynote address by Juan Somavia, and was followed by workshops on six main thematic clusters that address important international social issues: 1) the impact of globalization on work; 2) creating an environment conducive for growth and employment; 3) employment for women, youth, and the elderly; 4) human rights and employment for vulnerable groups; 5) employment in rural and urban areas; and 6) new forms of employment.

Recommendations stemming from the workshops on each cluster were presented, discussed, and endorsed in plenary sessions. The full set of final recommendations was presented to the ECOSOC High-Level Segment.

As SPSSI's representative to the UN in Geneva, I was involved in the July 2006 Civil Society Forum in 3 ways:

1) As co-organizer and chair of the lunch panel "Economic Ethics: Is a Universal Basic Income Sufficient for All?" Speakers recommended setting up, on a worldwide basis, safety nets that ensure basic social and material security.

2) As a panelist in the cluster on migration to ensure that a lifespan perspective is included in forum deliberations.

3) As a speaker during an interactive discussion between NGOs and dignitaries of the ECOSOC High-Level Segment (described above). In this discussion, I requested special attention to four social issues:

   (i) Recognition of work in the informal sector: "Decent work" is not only relevant to the formal paid sector but also to the informal sector - paid and unpaid (e.g., women's work and contribution to society).

   (ii) Inclusion of the aging of the population: Older persons represent an opportunity for society. On one hand, they are among the most vulnerable groups, and on the other, they contribute to creating employment and decent lives in the community.

   (iii) Role of psychology: The concept of "development through work" concerns not only economic and material aspects but also human development aspects. Therefore, the role of psychology should be part of the UN's work especially in tense situations such as wars and their aftermath and natural disasters.

   (iv) The role of science: In the UN, addressing such issues as decent work, decent lives, and migration is crucial. The architecture and dynamics of the world population has changed, but this is often overlooked. Therefore, a constant reality check is needed to create efficient and coherent policies. Science can offer this reality check.

Points (i) and (iv) were especially well-received during the deliberations. The points on the importance of psychology and human development (i) also received a very positive response from NGOs present at the meeting.

In conclusion, as we know too well, globalization is taking place in ways that result in unevenly distributed benefits within and among countries. Globalization requires an appropriate international framework that ensures a lifelong perspective on human

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1 Its partners include the NGO Section of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the NGO Liaison Office of the UN Office in Geneva and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation.

2 Juan Somavia is the Director-General of the International Labor Organization (ILO).


4 For example: International Labour Organization (ILO), International Telecommunication Union (ITU), Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), World Health Organization (WHO), UNAIDS, High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), UN Human Rights Council, World Trade Organization (WTO), UN Conference for Trade and Development (UNCTAD), World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), etc.
rights and on fairly compensated and safe employment. As SPSSI’s UN representative in Geneva, headquarters of many specialized UN agencies and international organisations, my efforts seek to bring a more human face to development and to effectively and collaboratively address social issues that have no national boundaries. I work with all sectors of the United Nations and other NGOs to guarantee a) that science helps policy makers distinguish facts from fiction and b) that the UN works with nations around the globe to secure basic human rights for all.

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