65th UN DPI/NGO Conference


This was the first annual conference attended by Judicial Watch since its association with the UN’s Department of Public Information in 2006. According to the history of the annual conferences posted on DPI’s website, for sixty years the annual conferences have been held at the United Nations headquarters in New York. The UN’s Department of Public Information held its first conference off-site at the UNESCO’s (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) headquarters in Paris, France, in 2008; and in 2011, the conference was held in Bonn, Germany. This year marked the first time since 2006 that the DPI/NGO conference was held at its UN headquarters in New York. And it provided an opportunity for Judicial Watch to attend the conference and observe how its mission in promoting good governance through transparency and accountability might be used for the benefit of the global community.

The theme of this year’s conference focused on the role of civil society in the post-2015 development agenda, with an outcome document to be compiled and shared with the UN community and other stakeholders at its conclusion. The theme of this conference was designed as a lead-in to the UN Climate Summit to take place on September 23 and the 69th annual session of the United Nations General Assembly, meeting from September 24 through October 1, at UN Headquarters in New York, “to deliberate the world’s most pressing issues: poverty and hunger; persistent unemployment; violent armed conflicts; faltering education systems; climate change and rising sea-levels; and inadequate infrastructure.”

A post-conference article, “2015 and Beyond: Our Action Agenda” on the IISD’s (International Institute for Sustainable Development) Internet site reported “An estimated 4,000 civil society representatives, from 100 NGOs, and 120 national delegates participated in the Conference, seeking to bring their input to the discussions on the post-2015 development agenda.”

As reported in the ISSD’s conference summary, both UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and Jan Eliasson, the UN Deputy Secretary-General, in their addresses to

*Judicial Watch is associated with the United Nations Department of Public Information (UN-DPI) as a nongovernmental organization, whose mission is to promote transparency, accountability and integrity in government, politics and the law. It fulfills its educational mission through litigation, investigations, and public outreach. Its International Program serves as an integral part of its educational program. Since 2001, it has been meeting with delegations from all over the world who participate in U.S. State Department-sponsored leadership programs. 
conference participants, lauded the work and importance of civil society NGOs. The Secretary-General, in a video message at the Opening Session, told participants:

I depend on NGOs to push world leaders along the right path. You understand that sovereignty carries responsibility. You know that political power is a sacred duty. And you have grassroots influence that can make history.

Jan Eliasson, stated further that

the work of civil society, often with limited resources and at personal and political risk, has been central to the promotion of peace, development and human rights.

“You are out there in the field, building bridges of solidarity. You advocate and engage. You debate and defend. You push and then push some more. And the world is better for it,” he added.

It is truly remarkable to gather in one place with representatives of NGOs from every corner of the world for the purpose of networking and collaborating on solutions to some of the world’s most challenging problems, from security issues such as crime and violence, hunger and disease, persecution and war, to major development issues of education, job opportunities, and women’s empowerment. There were 117 countries represented at this year’s 65th UN DPI NGO conference.

As someone who chose to fight against a system of injustice in India, Bollywood superstar Mallika Sherawat was a highlight for conference attendees and a role model for successful activism. She has used her stardom in furtherance of two MDGs: women empowerment and universal primary education. She chose to expose the treatment of women in her country, where women are denied an education—and survived an assassination attempt for speaking out. Further, citing UN statistics, she said that India was the most dangerous place for a woman to be born and that “on average, every 20 minutes a woman in India is raped.”

The Bollywood superstar was well received by the conference attendees and offered a compelling testimony of courage for her activism and outreach on behalf of the women in India. Yet the real superheroes of the conference were the thousands of individuals who gathered from all over the world—many living in dangerous and difficult circumstances—yet persevering in their commitment to make a positive impact in the lives of their communities. Consider the words of Hadiza Bala Usman, the Nigerian activist who, following the abduction of over 200 Nigerian school girls by the terrorist group Boko Haram, started a Twitter campaign, #BringBackOurGirls, to organize a rally and gather community support for the missing girls. She wasn’t dissuaded by the concerns of a friend who feared no one would show up. Her response: “Even if [only] 10 people come out [to the rally], it means that 10 people care.” And she has since held
numerous rallies to keep the pressure on Boko Haram and to promote rural school safety towards the fulfillment of one of the Millennium Development Goals: achieving universal primary education.

And these stories of successful outreaches are just a small sampling taken from the hundreds of civil society groups and activists represented at the conference who have stepped in the gap in a variety of ways to make a difference in their communities. This is the face of success.

Success is found in the unrelenting and incremental step-by-step movement forward by individual civil society groups and activists as they work to alleviate suffering and promote justice around the world just-one-step-at-a-time.

Judicial Watch’s mission in the promotion of transparency and accountability in government, politics, and the law is a cornerstone of good governance in the most influential nation in the world, the United States of America. As set forth in its Mission Statement, “through its educational endeavors, Judicial Watch advocates high standards of ethics and morality in the nation’s public life and seeks to ensure that political and judicial officials do not abuse the powers entrusted to them by the American people. Judicial Watch fulfills its educational mission through litigation, investigations, and public outreach.” The International Program is an integral part of its educational program.