



Official Newsletter of the Global Social Observatory  
Geneva, Switzerland

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## Introduction

We are committed to action and collaboration in response to the challenges we face today, alarming as they may be. We must stand up for what is right and to act accordingly. We believe in and respect the benefits that come from the interdependence of all people for a just society in every part of the world. We embrace the call from the President of France Emmanuel Macron to “Make Our Planet Great Again”.

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## I. GSO Activities

### GSO Annual Report for 2016-2017

In its thirteenth year, the GSO remains fully committed to providing a neutral platform for inclusive and mutually respectful dialogue and collaboration on global social issues. The Executive Director Katherine Hagen has submitted the latest annual report summarizing GSO activities in four priority areas - supporting (1) the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and (2) efforts to reduce inequality, with an emphasis on gender, along with (3) cross-cutting approaches to global health issues (with an emphasis on non-communicable diseases) and (4) building trust for multi-stakeholder collaboration through the prevention and management of conflicts of interest.

The GSO’s five-point SDG Action Plan is the GSO framework for implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It includes GSO capacity for mapping the initiatives of international organizations in Geneva, promoting multi-stakeholder collaboration in relation to these initiatives, disseminating news on SDG-related policy debates, providing opportunities for multi-sectoral dialogue and collaboration, and applying the GSO lessons learned for multi-stakeholder alignment to specific collaborative settings. As noted in the report, the GSO has collaborated with others this past year specifically on health, food security, trade and gender concerns. See the full report [here](#).

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### GSO General Assembly Interactive Dialogue: Disruption as a Force against Hunger

The GSO General Assembly held its annual membership meeting, open to members and friends, on Thursday, 11 May 2017. It is customary to include a special session at the General Assembly to enable participants to engage in an interactive dialogue. Because of the continuing

challenge to end hunger (close to a billion people worldwide still suffer from hunger), the focus this year was on “Disruption as a Force against Hunger: Calling Us into Action”. In spite of the progress in recent decades to reduce hunger by half, participants recognized that the status quo of current action won’t get us to zero, even with continued engagement of governments mobilizing both domestic and foreign resources.

Our dialogue barely scratched the surface of what participants would like to explore in a call to action for a dramatically different collaboration to address hunger. First, it was agreed that additional resources should be mobilized to target action for the 20 per cent of the world’s population that still suffer from chronic hunger. We recognized that education, ending political conflict and famine, fighting corruption and vested interests (including the lucrative drug trade) had to be addressed – with resources. Not only a modest increase in donor support was needed, but an entirely new emphasis on domestic resource mobilization had to occur for the sake of long-term sustainability.

Participants discussed the dilemma of entrenched interests that continue to block transformative action. Different approaches and sources are needed to get around the barriers to change – to stop doing the wrong things, including among donors who may want to maintain control of their resources. External influencers are needed to highlight efforts to fix the underlying problems, stimulate incremental change and scale up new geographic alignments. Concerns were raised about the risks of private sector engagement, whether we are talking here about the right to food or the right to water. But the point was made that there is a greater cost in NOT ending hunger when tools are available for blending these innovative financing mechanisms into a sustainable ecosystem.

Many proposals and ideas were discussed for mobilizing disruptive change to end hunger - increasing revenue from new sources for public investment, cultivating private financing and entrepreneurship, transforming agriculture, holding donors accountable, and moving out of silos to see the links between climate change, food and agricultural systems, water and sanitation. Consumer choice is key, and sustainable consumption does mean connecting environmental groups with human rights.

Further points were made about the role of local knowledge and community-based action, while also working within the context of global goals and universal values - and upholding an ethical framework.

Our interactive dialogue was a stimulating experience for all of us. Our special thanks to Carin Smaller and Nicolas Lorne for getting us started with their initial presentations. We parted company with an eagerness to continue the dialogue and to build supportive and transformational stakeholder networks to be part of the change we seek. Please look at the full report of the dialogue on the GSO website (available [here](#)).

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### **International Women’s Day: We still have a lot to learn**

International Women’s Day has been “celebrated” by the United Nations on 8 March ever since 1975 – and has an even longer history associated with protests involving working women and suffragettes going back a hundred years. This is a long learning curve for what we call “gender parity” or “gender equality”, but we are reminded of the remarkably poetic ways of Maya Angelou who once – and probably more than once – said “I’ve learned that I still have a lot to learn.” Here we are in 2017, caught up with an occasion that stirs our passion for a goal that seems to be so well laid out but that remains beyond our reach. On 8 March 2017, GSO’s Executive Director Katherine Hagen moderated a panel at the WTO on one of these learning paths – on “Trade and Women’s Economic Empowerment”.

Some of the messages may be obvious, but it is the dynamic flow of accumulated messages, including some key points from participants in the audience, that provides a new learning path. In general, the emphasis was on policies affecting women’s opportunities in small and medium enterprises – having the right data to measure progress, overcoming cultural barriers, looking at the whole value chain, involving all stakeholders (male and female), moving beyond gender-neutral policy to gender-sensitive policy, identifying the most conducive sectors for empowerment, and scaling up the capacity building.

We encourage an initiative at the WTO to support a far-reaching analysis on the gender impact of trade policies. In addition to these messages related to the impact of trade policies on gender-empowered entrepreneurship, the GSO believes that there should also be consideration given to the employment of the millions of women as workers, especially in developing countries, and how they are affected by trade policies. In conclusion, the GSO supports a learning path that would include an analysis of trade rules and their impact on women, perhaps even a session devoted to this at the next WTO Ministerial Conference (MC11) in Buenos Aires next December 2017. See the full report of the 8 March panel [here](#).

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### Health Issues and the Role of Non-State Actors at the World Health Assembly

As a neutral forum for multi-stakeholder engagement and as described in the 2016-2017 annual report (see above), the GSO's activities focus on four priority areas, including cross-cutting approaches to global health issues and building trust for multi-stakeholder collaboration. In line with these priorities, GSO Executive Director Katherine Hagen was pleased to serve on the delegation of the Global Health Council at the World Health Assembly in May. There were many side events organized by the GHC, the NCD Alliance and others with a focus on the global health targets from the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Many of these events also addressed the importance of multi-stakeholder partnerships, especially in the prevention and management of non-communicable diseases. The GSO was especially pleased to attend a dialogue on partnering at a breakfast hosted by the WHO's Global Coordinating Mechanism for NCDs.

At the WHA itself, the main events were the election of a new Director-General, Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, who starts his five-year tenure on 1 July 2017 and a new budget for 2018 to 2019 that includes a 3 per cent increase in assessments. The WHA also adopted many substantive resolutions (see a summary [here](#)), and we note that there were several directed to our main interest in NCDs. In addition, the GSO followed the progress report on the implementation of the Framework for Engagement with Non-State Actors

(FENSA). The GSO was pleased to support an intervention on this topic by the Global Health Council (see a copy [here](#)).

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### Become a GSO member

The GSO's mission is to promote and provide a forum for multi-stakeholder dialogue on contemporary social issues. Sign up for individual membership on our [website](#). Some of our services include:

- Providing a neutral and inclusive forum for dialogue and collaboration
- Contributing to mutual understanding of diverse perspectives
- Facilitating a broadened search for solutions
- Promoting action and partnership building
- Serving as a clearing house for research on social issues

Benefits of GSO membership include:

- E-mail alerts of and invitations to all GSO events
- Receipt of all GSO meeting reports and papers
- News alerts on matters and issues of concern to ongoing GSO projects and initiatives.

GSO members are invited to take part in the annual General Assembly and hear first-hand oral reports from GSO officials and project leaders, and participate in discussions on GSO priorities.

If you are interested in becoming an individual member, please sign up [here](#), or [contact us](#).

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## II. Commentary on International Organizations and NGOs

### The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Paris Agreement

The setback of the US announcement of intent to withdraw from the Paris Agreement on Climate Change

has stirred a lot of criticism but also a lot of action to circumvent the effect of the announcement from US states, municipalities, businesses, and civil society. Other governments are also reaffirming their commitments to implementing the Paris Agreement. One could even argue that the fate of global climate change policy is being pulled in an inevitably forward direction by the momentum of innovation and technological change, regardless of any misguided setbacks from the White House. The GSO reports here on recent events and reports of interest to the GSO, with an optimistic view of the transformations that we think are truly taking hold around the world - and even in the US at the subnational level.

The core feature of the Paris Agreement is the system of voluntary nationally determined contributions (NDCs) for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Even though advocates of more aggressive climate change policies were critical of the voluntary and inadequately ambitious nature of the nationally determined contributions, the GSO sees the Paris deal as a powerful framework for doing even more than was agreed to in 2015. Urban initiatives are especially of note here, but one can also see lots of momentum in renewable energy developments, in agriculture, in transport, and even in consumption patterns.

The dramatic increase in the number of non-state actors (the UNFCCC terminology is “non-Party Observers”) is yet another symptom of this forward momentum. There are 2,121 “admitted” non-Party Observers today, DOUBLE the number in 2008. This is truly awesome. See the list for the UNFCCC [here](#). The UNFCCC is a single-issue entity with a highly mobilized NGO community. At the World Health Organization (WHO), in contrast, there are only 206 accredited NGOs in [Official Relations](#). Here, the single-issue focus has been jealously guarded from NGO “encroachment” by its member States.

It should also be noted that the non-Party Observers are organized into nine “Major Groups” that have evolved in the UNFCCC system (in contrast to the four categories in the new WHO policy framework). We have assumed that the nine groups were set up from the very beginning – when the UNFCCC was negotiated at the 1992 Rio Conference. But we have since learned that the process was actually incremental - environmental NGOs (ENGOs) and business and industry (BINGOs) were the first ones.

Local and municipal governments as a group were added in 1995, followed by indigenous peoples in 2001, research institutions and independents (RINGOs) in 2003, trade unions (TUNGOs) in 2008, women and gender (no acronym) and youth (YOUNGOs) in 2011 and farmers (again no acronym) even more recently. See more on this evolution from the European Climate Policy Info Hub [here](#). Some key groups, such as faith based organizations or parliamentary organizations, still do not have official constituencies. The ENGOs, meanwhile, have split into a left-wing group led by Climate Justice Now! and a more moderate group led by the Climate Action Network.

In Bonn, we attended a special workshop on “opportunities to further enhance the effective engagement of non-Party stakeholders...” In preparation for the workshop, the UNFCCC Secretariat had prepared [a summary](#) of some 43 proposals for enhancing engagement, mostly from NGOs but also from the European Union. The proposals encompassed ways to enhance the contributions of expertise and diversity of NGOs, to expand opportunities for engagement, showcasing and even linkages to other intergovernmental processes – AND to addressing conflict of interest directed at the business NGOs. This proved to be the main topic of fairly heated debate at this workshop. The anti-corporate NGOs, however, encountered resistance from many of the other NGOs and strong statements from Norway, Canada and Australia. Thus, the stridency of the critics is unlikely to result in the exclusion of business groups from the UNFCCC process.

Historically, business representatives in the UNFCCC process were identified as resisting climate change science and were predominantly associated with the coal and oil industries. But this has changed as more and more industries involving renewable energy are becoming active in the UNFCCC, and as more and more other business sectors are embracing climate change policies voluntarily. But even the coal and oil industries have taken on renewable energy options and other initiatives to address climate change. There may be a push for greater transparency, but the main point is that business groups are almost completely in favor of reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

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## The Green Initiative at the 2017 International Labour Conference

This leads to the Director-General's thematic report for the 2017 International Labour Conference, entitled [Work in a changing climate: The Green Initiative](#). This report from the D-G has caught the mood of the infusion of world of work concerns with the momentum towards a low carbon economy. The report acknowledges that the ILO and its constituents have been slow to respond to the alarm bells of global warming. He even refers to two previous D-G reports from 1992 and 2006 on the same subject that failed to trigger the ILO to action. On this occasion, however, he correctly argues that climate change has very rapidly moved to a level of central importance, triggered by the dramatic changes that have been incorporated into the Paris Agreement.

This Agreement, he argues, is a truly pivotal event- as we have already observed from developments in Bonn. The Agreement itself recognizes that work is a central factor contributing to climate change and that work has to be a central factor in the prevention, mitigation and adaptation to climate change. That is why the UNFCCC includes collaboration with the ILO on the elaboration of a "just transition" for the Paris Agreement that incorporates the world of work. For the ILO, this also means that sustainable development needs to be pursued in full regard of its social and economic as well as its environmental dimensions. A positive sign for this heightened commitment is the decision taken by the ILO Governing Body in March to ADD a concern about climate change as one of the ILO's cross-cutting issues for the ILO Programme and Budget in the next biennium, 2018 to 2019. Follow this further at the International Labour Conference, meeting in Geneva from 5 to 15 June 2017.

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## The Future of US Engagement in the Human Rights Council

The 34<sup>th</sup> session of the Human Rights Council is meeting in Geneva from 6 to 23 June 2017. Given the announcement just a few days before by the US Administration to withdraw from the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, there was heightened concern that the US might also withdraw from the Human Rights Council. In fact, the US Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley had already stirred up this concern with her announced plans

to pay a visit on 6 June 2017 to the Human Rights Council – a first from a sitting US Ambassador to the UN in New York. It was already known, furthermore, that the US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson had publicly communicated that continued US participation in the Council would depend on substantial reforms, mostly having to do with ending the way it singles out of Israel on human rights of Palestinians (which remains a specific agenda item for Council sessions).

As it turned out, Ambassador Haley did reiterate the US expectation for reforms that include both the removal of this agenda item on Israel and a procedural change for the at-large election of all Council members. At a lecture delivered at the Graduate Institute following her appearance at the Council, she elaborated on the rationale for this procedural change. She clarified that she wants all Council members to be held accountable for their human rights record, and she wants more action on resolutions condemning more countries for their violations of human rights, including even US allies like Saudi Arabia. Although the general speculation is that neither of the specific reforms she has proposed will be accepted by the rest of the Council, her message seems to be that some actual momentum on resolutions might take care of her immediate concerns.

One can expect the Human Rights Council, meanwhile, to be deeply affected by the recent outbursts of terrorism throughout the world. Council members should be mobilizing behind Mexico's announced plans to lead negotiations on a resolution specifically devoted to the effects of terrorism on human rights. There may also be significant spillover effects on the Council's resolutions, debates and side events on civil society space, freedom of association and assembly, and even human rights on the Internet. There is even a special side event being organized by Austria on "fake news"!

Other issues before the Council may also be affected by the reactions to US actions on climate change and other populist pronouncements from the US Administration. The Philippines is leading discussions on a resolution on climate change – plus a side event on the impact of climate change on migration and cross-border displacement. And in addition to the resolution on terrorism, Mexico has announced work on another resolution to address the rights of migrants, as a

contribution to the negotiations at the UN on a Global Compact on Migration. Another focus on US policies comes from an NGO called CIVICUS that is co-hosting two events on freedom of association and assembly, including one specifically directed at the US policies on freedom of association and assembly. A third CIVICUS side event features the business case for civic space.

Finally, this summer session of the Human Rights Council is the one annually devoted to a day of discussions on women and human rights. The Council has devoted special segments on violence against women and girls, with specific attention to the role of men and boys, and another on gender and health. But there are several side events as well- on women’s economic empowerment, on raising awareness more broadly for gender equity among men and boys (a “barbershop” event), and on child, early and forced marriage. Other issues being addressed by the Council with a gender connection during this session include efforts to combat human trafficking, to combat discrimination against LGBT rights, and to elaborate on what “protection of the family” means in the context of human rights.

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### III. Upcoming Events

#### Key upcoming events of interest to the GSO

|                     |   |
|---------------------|---|
| 5-9 Jun             | UN <a href="#">Oceans Conference Implementation of SDG 14</a> (in NYC)  |
| 5-17 Jun            | ILO <a href="#">106<sup>th</sup> International Labour Conference</a>    |
| 6-23 Jun            | HRC <a href="#">35<sup>th</sup> Session of the Human Rights Council</a> |
| 7-9 Jun             | WIPO <a href="#">Seminar on IP and Traditional Knowledge</a>            |
| 12-16 Jun           | ITU <a href="#">WSIS Forum on Information Societies for SDGs</a>        |
| 28-30 Jun           | <a href="#">Global Forum on Migration and Development</a> (in Berlin)   |
| 3-8 Jul             | FAO <a href="#">Conference 40<sup>th</sup> Session</a> (in Rome)        |
| 7-8 Jul<br>Hamburg) | G20 <a href="#">Heads of State Summit</a> (in Hamburg)                  |
| 10-19 Jul           | UN <a href="#">High-Level Political Forum</a> (in NYC)                  |

|               |   |
|---------------|---|
| 18-19 Jul     | IOM <a href="#">International Dialogue on Migration: Understanding Vulnerabilities</a>            |
| 27 Aug -1 Sep | SIWI <a href="#">World Water Week: Water and Waste</a> (in Stockholm)                             |
| 12-25 Sep     | UN <a href="#">72<sup>nd</sup> Session of the UN General Assembly</a>                             |
| 11-29 Sep     | HCR <a href="#">36<sup>th</sup> Session of the Human Rights Council</a>                           |
| 25-29 Sep     | UNEP <a href="#">First Conference for the Minamata Convention on Mercury</a>                      |
| 26-28 Sep     | WTO <a href="#">2017 Public Forum on Trade: Behind the Headlines</a>                              |
| 2-11 Oct      | WIPO <a href="#">57<sup>th</sup> Series of Assemblies</a>   |
| 9-13 Oct      | FAO <a href="#">Committee on Food Security – CFS 44</a> (in Rome)                                 |
| 18-20 Oct     | WHO <a href="#">Global Conference on Non-Communicable Diseases</a> (in Montevideo)                |
| 23-27 Oct     | OHCHR <a href="#">Open-ended Intergovernmental Working Group on TNCs</a>                          |
| 6-17 Nov      | UNFCCC <a href="#">Conference of the Parties 23</a> (in Bonn)                                     |
| 14-16 Nov     | ILO <a href="#">IV Global Conf on the Sustained Eradication of Child Labour</a> (in Buenos Aires) |
| 27-29 Nov     | OHCHR <a href="#">Seventh Business and Human Rights Forum</a>                                     |
| 4- 6 Dec      | UNEP <a href="#">Third UN Environment Assembly</a> (in Nairobi)                                   |
| 11-14 Dec     | WTO <a href="#">11<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Conference MC11</a> (in Buenos Aires)                 |
| 18-21 Dec     | IGF <a href="#">12<sup>th</sup> Internet Governance Forum</a>                                     |

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### IV. Who We Are

The Global Social Observatory (GSO) is an international organization founded in the Canton of Geneva, Switzerland in April 2004. The mission of the GSO is to initiate dialogue on social issues in order to encourage leaders to engage in a broadened search for solutions and policy coherence. This service is based on a participatory process in a neutral space that brings all interested parties together across national boundaries to identify solutions and policies that are coherent.

These solutions can then contribute to policy-making at the governmental and intergovernmental levels. Visit our [website](#) for regular news and project updates.

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