Growing the Global Voices of Civil Society: 
Toward a Just and Peaceful Planet
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Introduction

In the last several decades, civil society actors have exerted a global voice to foster peace and justice in many settings-sometimes with considerable impact, and sometimes with little effect\(^1\). Civil society actors have been central in campaigns to end slavery, to promote control and disarmament of nuclear weapons, to reduce violations of human rights, to ban landmines, and to regulate the war-promoting trade in “conflict diamonds.” They have campaigned less successfully to prevent the war in Iraq and to end state sponsored terrorism in Darfur. This scenario seeks to identify patterns associated with effective civil society voice, particularly on issues of peace and justice, and then to describe how those patterns might shape global issues in the future.

Background: Civil Society and Global Voice

These global civil society voices must cope with many challenges to emerge as clear and compelling calls for action. Civil society organizations are notoriously diverse on many dimensions: They are grounded in many different values, ideologies and analyses; they often compete for resources; they are fiercely independent and jealous of their autonomy of analysis and action; they are often loyal to primary constituencies that do not agree on the need for alliance-building and cohesive action for large-scale policy influence. To exert global voice on behalf of marginalized groups, they may have to span many levels from the local to the regional to the national to the global, and in the process build syntheses and dovetailed alliances that can respond to very different interests at those levels. Civil society actors are perennially short of resources-funds, information, professional skills, policy expertise, political clout and others-that are critical to effective voice at the global level. Often critical resources are available from other sectors, such as sympathetic governments or transnational corporations with similar interests, but civil society organizations are often very suspicious of institutions from other sectors and concerned about the costs of cooperating with them. A critical issue for many global campaigns is civil society’s fundamental lack of power to gain attention or to influence critical actors, and so their marginalization in the global decision-making process.

It is remarkable given these challenges that civil society has actually enjoyed as much influence as it has. We believe that at least six elements have been important raising the volume of civil society voices in global policy-making.

1) **Framing issues in terms of values that mobilize support across countries and levels.** The capacity of civil society actors to articulate issues in ways that mobilize many actors, from business leaders and government officials to the general public, has been critical to building campaign momentum. Explaining how the trade in African “conflict diamonds” fosters murder, mutilation of innocent women and children, and unending conflict helps potential supporters see how their commitment and resources can serve widely held values over the course of long-term policy campaigns. \(^2\)

2) **Building linkages across levels national regional boundaries.** Civil society alliances have struggled to build alliances that include grassroots and marginalized community based organizations, national NGOs, and transnational civil society networks that could represent
local interests while making use of the expertise and influence of international agencies. A series of campaigns on behalf of communities displaced by construction of large dams, for example, gradually built a transnational alliance that could effectively challenge both governments and international financial institutions, as in the campaigns over the Narmada dams in India and the Itaparica Dam in Brazil.

3) **Illuminating inability of existing transnational institutions to handle the issue.** Civil society campaigns have often demonstrated the failures of existing institutions to deal effectively with transnational problems. They have documented the failure of the UN to implement the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the destructive impact of World Bank projects on the environment, and the failure of international peacekeeping efforts in Rwanda and Darfur. Analysts now argue that new institutions that include civil society actors are required to build solutions to global problems that existing global institutions cannot handle.

4) **Building a power base for influencing transnational governance.** Civil society's influence in global public policy-making requires creating bases for influencing transnational actors and decisions. Sometimes the power base may grow out of networks of elite decision-makers concerned about an issue, as in the Transparency International campaign to make bribery in international business deals illegal. Sometimes power bases are created from appeals to mass audiences, as in the disarmament and debt relief campaigns. Sometimes the threat of public boycotts is enough to catalyze cross-sector collaboration, as in the campaign to regulate conflict diamonds. While civil society campaigns are often most visible when they engage in public confrontations, they may be more effective in when they create conditions for joint action across sectors. The World Commission on Dams, created in response to prolonged controversies over construction of large dams, involved civil society, governments, businesses and international agencies in assessing past experience and creating standards for future dam-building—but it probably would not have emerged without many demonstrations of civil society power to block dam-building.

5) **Building alliances with other sectors to mobilize needed resources.** Often civil society alliances cannot mobilize the financial and political resources to gain traction on transnational problems without creating alliances with governments, corporations, media and intergovernmental organizations. The landmines campaign, for example, built alliances with the governments of Canada and several other countries to craft initiatives that provided a realistic base for international collective action. Similarly, the leadership of the Government of South Africa and the de Beers mining company were critical to the success of the conflict diamonds campaign.

6) **Using public legitimacy to create and shape compelling international discourses.** Global surveys indicate that the general public in many countries trust civil society organizations more than they trust their governments or transnational businesses. Civil society alliances can use the legitimacy grounded in their value-based missions and lack of financial stake to catalyze public discourses on controversial issues. The campaign to reduce violence against women, for example, was able to integrate across many forms of violence in different countries to build an international discourse about the importance of protecting women from private as well as public violence. This campaign helped to focus attention on the ways in
which non-state actors may violate the rights of vulnerable individuals—a framing which significantly broadened the concept of "human rights" in the international arena.7

These six themes—framing shared value issues, linking across levels and nations, identifying inadequacies of existing institutions, building power bases, allying with other sectors, and using public legitimacy—have different emphases in different campaigns, of course. But the diversity and independence of civil society organizations is both strength and a weakness. Their ability to respond to diverse concerns and to generate innovative responses to new situations is complemented with their difficulties in building alliances that are large and cohesive enough to influence major actors in transnational governance. One consequence is that civil society campaigns cannot be mandated by any central institution or venue; rather they must be politically and socially constructed by activists from many levels and countries who are committed to improving the performance of existing institutions.

Growing Civil Society Voices 2006-2016: Global Peace and Justice

The nature of civil society makes it most able to generate effective voice when the issues can be focused in terms of issues that strongly affect activists and the people they care about.

By 2006 civil society actors had launched campaigns in several areas that held promise for creating global policies in response to worst aspects of intra and inter-state warfare.

Regulating trade that fosters conflict and injustice.

A civil society report on the role of unregulated diamond trade that encouraged “revolutions” by gangster armies interested in controlling diamond fields catalyzed the multi-year Kimberly Process to develop systems for making it more difficult to sell illicit diamonds. With leadership by Government of South Africa and De Beers as well as a coalition of NGOs, Process produced a regulatory regime that makes it more difficult to sell illicit diamonds for arms. At least part of the reason for participation by governments and industry was recognition that a civil-society led campaign for public boycott of "blood diamonds" might do great harm to the industry and governments dependent on it. This campaign has set the stage for much greater transparency in several industries, including gold and oil in the “public what you pay” campaign that is pushing for more public information about who is paid what in extractive industry dealings.

By 2010 dealings by transnational business are subject to increasingly intense scrutiny by national and international civil society actors who are highly sensitized to the possibility that unregulated trade, particularly in very valuable commodities, can catalyze inter- and intra-national conflicts with devastating impacts on highly vulnerable populations. This scrutiny is supported by increased interest among industrialized populations as a consequence of popular films (“Blood Diamond,” “Hotel Rwanda”), celebrity involvement in problem areas (Bono, Brangelina, Madonna), and increasing email and video traffic on the internet which helped to disseminate unfiltered information about behavior in remote areas. The public has also become increasingly skeptical about the behavior of transnational corporations in the absence of regulation and close accountability. Businesses have become highly aware of the potentials of an aroused populace who target offending industries after the collapse of the African diamond and
gold markets in response to the “No Dirty Gold” and “No Blood Diamonds” campaigns after the revelations of the failure of trade regulation systems in 2012.

**Controlling genocide and promoting the rule of law.**

Civil societies as well as governments were embarrassed by their failures to foresee and forestall genocide in Rwanda. That failure contributed to increased attention to genocidal activity by the state and its militia henchmen in the Sudan, where civil society disaster relief organizations risked staff lives to support the victims of terrorism. The horrors of Darfur were also highly visible to people in the industrialized world at the same time that the ineffectiveness of the US democracy promoting agenda was becoming all-too-visible in Iraq. Disillusion with government ability to protect humanity or even to carry out its own projects increased attention to the possibilities of civil society for effective action.

At the same time, public outrage, civil society activism, and government initiatives were raising the possibility of punishing egregious offenders against peace and human rights. Efforts to hold ex-rulers accountable for their crimes-Charles Taylor in Liberia, Mengistu in Ethiopia, Slobodan Milosevic in Serbia and Pinochet in Chile-gained considerable currency, suggesting that authorities both inside and outside countries could punish crimes like genocide and torture.

Civil society roles in controlling genocide and torture took a large step forward in 2007 when transnational NGOs allied with transnational corporations and several country governments to challenge China's complicity with the government of the Sudan to commit genocide in the Darfur. The coalition proposed economic sanctions and boycotts of Chinese consumer goods if they continued to block UN support for refugees and provision of a strong peace-keeping force in Darfur.

A global campaign to hold both state and non-state actors to the global rule of law grew out of the success of the Darfur Campaign in 2012. The multi-sector coalition from that campaign saw the importance of public education and support for global rule of law and the strengthening of the International Criminal Court as a vehicle for holding leaders and states accountable to those expectations. The reaction to the unaccountable excesses of the Bush Administration in the US catalyzed by Congressional investigations led to widespread public support for US accountability to the ICC as well.

By 2016 it had become clear that the global rule of law was essential to the continued growth of the global economy. While historically business had little interest in countries or regions that did not have a large population of middle-class consumers, innovations in the “business at the bottom of the pyramid” had demonstrated that business in cooperation with NGOs could generate and profit from services aimed at improving the lives of billions of relatively poor people. But business at the bottom of the pyramid is also seriously disrupted by violations of the rule of law-and even more by the problems of “failed states”- so business interests welcomed alliances with civil society and government to create more accountable governance and institutional arrangements

**Back to the Future: How did it happen?**
“As for the global challenge of terrorism, we have reason to expect, from the leaders of the world working against it, rather greater clarity.”
Amartya Sen, Identity and Violence p 79

“The increasing political engagement by certain NGOs stems largely from the fact that development keeps increasing the gap between the rich and the poor”

Summary

Global civil society occupies a key position in international policy circles. There is every reason to think that this position will remain strong or even grow in importance over time. What are the values, the ideas, the hopes, and the dreams that will underpin a next stage in strengthening the voice of global civil society? The authors of this scenario believe that the mechanisms of collaboration are already present within existing global civil society structures. Eurodad is one example of such an advocacy alliance but there are many others. The challenge is not so much one of designing the new car, but of knowing where we want to go and how we wish to travel together. It is an opportunity for deepening shared values, building relations of trust and creating a permanent process of alliance building. We suggest that the two fundamental desires of global peace (peace in households, communities and nations) combined with the urgency of dealing with the gap between the rich and the poor (Make Poverty History campaign for example) may well be the gathering themes for global civil society. These gathering themes must acknowledge the leadership and vision of women and understand that a just and peaceful planet must deal with all living systems.

Global civil society in its diverse and complex forms offers three important and distinct capacities in the search for a more just and peaceful planet. First GCS has a proven track record for its power to convene. The WSF and other similar networks and regional events have been the largest international gatherings of human beings in history. Second, GCS has a vast repertoire of skills, communications networks, campaigning experience and successes in building global consensus. Third, GCS has privileged access to grass roots knowledge, values, culture and perspectives.

Global civil society needs to continue to move as is often said, from protest to proposal, from reaction to action, from consumers of UN and Global political structures agendas to the fostering of a vision of the world we want. The scenario elaborated briefly in this paper is designed to stimulate our collective imaginations. It is a contribution to a new utopic vision, not utopia as in an unrealistic dream, but utopia as a necessary vision in building a more just and peaceful world. The scenario hopefully also lends some credibility to the notion that even complex challenges are possible to achieve. Finally it is dedicated to the idea that we have no choice but to work towards a new global diplomacy. This is offered in openness, humility and the desire to be helpful.

2016

It is the year 2016. A set of global protocols, institutional arrangements and processes for
drawing on the capacities of civil society organizations is working well. This set of arrangements and understandings are multi-centred with research, advocacy and communicative capacities distributed throughout existing organizations and networks throughout the world. One could see the beginnings of the alliance in the practices of the global campaigns of the late 20th and early 21st century (i.e. Global Campaign for Education, Jubilee Campaign, Anti-Dam Campaigns) and the lessons of the World Social Forum during that same period. Specific tools for consensus building and effective advocacy were already present in many organizations in 2006. The achievement of an effective and established set of protocols and processes for tapping global civil society capacities grew from a series of common projects and meetings where a shared analysis was built and where trust and common values were established.

The heart of the communications structure is an interactive internet-based structure (sometimes referred to as Web 2) that combines elements of call-centre technology with interactive tools for knowledge creation, distribution and exchange. Expertise and up-to-date knowledge is always available from grass-roots sources. Global Civil Society has in this way taken advantage of one of its time-honoured advantages: access to grass roots knowledge about what is needed and what is working throughout the world.

The protocols and ways of working (which we refer to in places as a “Venue” alliance of autonomous and diverse GCS networks many of which were founded in the 1990s and early 2000s. By 2016, the venue has established communications, research and partnership protocols with several groupings of global political networks (G-20, L-22, G-8, non-aligned). The purposes of the GCS venue include:

1. Highlighting the vision of citizens everywhere of a just and peaceful planet as a way of bringing us all together.
2. Representation of diverse GCS views within the context of specific global political and policy contexts;
3. Increased visibility of the roles, diversity, capacities, rights and responsibilities of GCS organizations/networks;
4. Enhanced collaboration and specialization amongst GCS organizations and enhanced capacities for analysis and action on critical issues facing citizens of the world.

The years 2005-2008 were difficult ones for the poorest peoples of the world. Governmental resources had been redirected on a global scale towards security issues and military approaches to conflict resolution. A narrow understanding of security had replaced development, poverty elimination, health (including HIV/AIDS) or education for-all as the dominant focus for global expenditure. The use of or threat of use of military force had become for the global super power of the day, a key tool for global political intervention. Policies in the military super power of the day such as the legitimacy of the “pre-emptive” military strike overcame generations of preference for the primacy of international law. Opposition to the use of military tools and violence by many sides in the global struggles of the day was often denounced as naive, siding with terrorism or even treason. Many innocent persons were jailed, disappeared or killed in a
global climate where violence had become both the object of fear and the tool to achieve better security.

**Shared Concerns**

Global civil society organizations of the day had diverse histories, strategies and ways of viewing the world of 2006, but they found themselves in agreement that a world system built on the following had little to offer the majority of citizens of the world:

- Violence as a key instrument of security;
- Failure to address historic global conflicts (Israel-Palestine, Southern Sudan, Kashmir);
- Failure to address poverty (and its incumbent issues such as HIV/AIDS) and;
- Aggressive competition for control of non-renewable resources such as oil;

The false polarization of the world into “good” and “bad” guys was conceptually bankrupt and dangerous to the survival of all people, rich and poor and to the biosphere itself.

Person by person, organization by organization, network by network it had become clear that the fate of the earth was too important to leave to the governments and ‘market forces”.

The Globespan polling data of 2005/2006 across 20 northern & southern countries suggested that people trust NGOs more than they trust the United Nations, Transnational Corporations or governments. It was noted that over the years 2000-2006 trust for all those institutions had been declining but it was still highest for non-governmental or civil society organizations.

**Building on positive developments**

2006 was a time when more rapid positive changes began to happen. The shared concerns of the rise of violence as an instrument of global policy was countered in the minds of many of the delegates in Waterloo by an awareness of many positive developments which could be seen as enabling factors in moving a just and peaceful GCS agenda forward.

The rise in numbers of national, regional and global civil society organizations over the last years of the 20th and early 21st century was an unparalleled expression of human desire to work towards a better world. Information technology has among other things become a catalyst for worldwide consciousness and information sharing. The European Union was seen as a practical example of international collaboration and interdependence. Led by CSOs nearly universal awareness of climate change and ecological fragility had been achieved (in spite of slower mechanisms to act on that awareness). The global march of February 2003 when vast numbers of people took to the streets of the world in rejection of US unilateralism offered much hope for what can be done and what people care deeply for everywhere. The identification these and other positive trends became a base for describing the emergence of GCS as a positive force.

The meeting of some 40 citizens from around the world who had gathered in Waterloo, Ontario,
Canada was one space where the search for a kind of “global peace tent” (building on the metaphor and actual practice from the 1985 International NGO Women’s Conference in Nairobi) began to come together.

In Waterloo, it was noted that:

1. Timing was right for a push towards a deep vision of a just and peaceful planet, a gathering theme for civil society organizations.

2. GCSOs voices needed to be more widely heard on the critical issues of the day;

3. An alternative approach to global diplomacy which eliminates/reduces violence as a key instrument needs to be identified and put forward;

4. That the unmatched capacity of GCS to convene citizens (WSF), the effective tools of GCS (campaigns, networks, direct grass roots interventions) and the unmatched access of GCS to grass roots knowledge be mobilized in the interest of a just and peaceful planet; and that

5. The experiences of women working together in global networking over the past 20 years are foundational to hope for success;

What is the Basis for Legitimacy of Civil Society Organisations?

An important discussion was begun in Waterloo to better understand the underlying base for GCS legitimacy and influence in global decision-making? Participants were cautious about assuming that democratic representation is the sole or most important base, since that puts GCS in direct competition with arguably democratic national governments. It was suggested that a focus on representing regional constituencies (e.g., indigenous peoples) or populations with special interests at issue (e.g., affected by dams) or bringing special technical knowledge or capacity to speak for widely held values was an important base of legitimacy. There was also discussion about relying on trust in GCS to mobilize popular support. It was broadly agreed that getting clearer about bases of legitimacy will help define what sort of “critical mass” is needed and what kinds of global values need to be articulated and accepted.

Principles of Collaboration

The Waterloo meeting, among other things, noted that any movement forward amongst GCSOs would need to:

a. Create initiatives that utilize the information and resources of multiple sectors to solve problems that cannot be solved without joint action.

b. Emphasize fairness and sustainability in transnational problem-solving outcomes, especially in distributing resources and responsibilities between Northern and Southern constituents.
c. Be inclusive attending also to spiritual, ceremonial and cultural dimensions of life

**Key Moments 2006-2016**

**October 2006**  
Meeting of the GCS Venue Working Group at the University of Waterloo

1. Agreement to continue exploring a process leading to the creation of a venue for global civil society.

2. Identification of next steps: themes, working groups (with a majority of majority world representatives), process of mapping global civil society, an interactive web site, consultation with members and leaders in each of the various GCS.

3. Agreement on the usefulness of Summit of GCS representatives in 2009

4. Agreement to work together on the next G-8 conference in Germany

5. Identification of who is missing that is critical to moving the venue process forward.

**January 2007**

**Making use of already existing GCS Spaces**

Each of the organizations present in Waterloo will take back the ideas from Waterloo to their constituencies for further clarification and creativity. Which aspects of a new “venue” or of the on-going process of alliance building could any of the GCS take on? Are there sectoral themes (environment, poverty, human security, education, health, HIV/ AIDS) that can be taken up?

**World Social Forum**

1. Many of the participants at the Waterloo event are also leading networks involved in the Nairobi WSF process.

2. The WSF was seen a space for further consultation and identification of additional persons, resources as and ideas.

3. The structured of the WSF and principles were examined for possible lessons for a GCS venue.

**Knowledge Exchange Structures: Gates Foundation discussions**

It was brought to the attention of those participating the GCS Process that the Gates Foundation
needed to spend $3 Billion per year to meet its legal obligations. Conversations began with the Gates Foundation to create the informational infrastructural platform for global civil society that could assure cost effective communications amongst key players in every part of the world.

There were many issues to be resolved including agreements for multiple platforms and open source collaboration on the development of tools, but this led to an agreement in 2008 to begin work with a global civil society working group on communications and knowledge exchange structures.

2008- Regional, Sectoral and Network consultations

Regional meetings to discuss the 2009 “The World We Want” plan. As well alternative arrangements for increased global civil society collaboration are worked out with local, regional, sectoral and alternative global networks.

Regional meetings are held in: China, India, Europe, West Africa, East and Southern Africa, Arabic-speaking states, Latin America, North America, and Caribbean.

Consultations are also held within each of the cooperating partner organizations

2009 -“The World We Want” Gathering of GCS Representatives/Leaders
Building the legitimacy of GCS

Nearly 200-250 leaders from global civil society organizations gather to formulate a definitive process for the achievement of a venue (a set of agreed upon protocols and administrative arrangements) for GCS and discussion of the already by now fairly well evolved practices of making decisions within GCS on how to respond to various activities, which global joint action themes to move forward, how to avoid being captives of either the UN bureaucracy or the big government agendas.

The purpose of this event was to deepen the participation of civil society organizations, broaden the alliance-building process and identify action themes structures.

CIVICUS and FIM with the involvement of other key GCS networks organized this event.

2010 - Review of Millennium Development Goals

GCS are involved in the review of the MDGs noting that five years remain with much work to be done. A GCS strategy is released prior to the MDG review meetings. Advocacy, lobbying and influence to be used with national delegations.

Clarification of expectations and roles of GCS in the monitoring, implementation and achievement of MDGs is obtained.

2010 and 2011 Further Identifying specific areas for joint action and development of
sectoral action plans

Regional, sectoral and technical consultations on what the critical areas for joint GCS action are to be. The development and elaboration of research agendas, advocacy strategies, and degrees of grass roots support are held during these two years as a lead up to the Global Summit and to further advance the “venue” process.

A working group on a Global Charter is established which is understood to carry the weight of the 1945 UN Charter on Human Rights.

2012 Global Summit of Civil Society
An enhanced World Social Forum event?

This would be a large gathering of 10-15,000 persons who come together to agree to:

a. A Charter on a vision of the “World We Want” - a just and peaceful planet and the role of global civil society.

b. Identification of action agenda for collective GCS work together.

c. Development of country and sector action plans.

d. A moving symbolic event -builds on the universal need for hope.

2012-2015 "Venue" is in place

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2006</th>
<th>Waterloo Agreement</th>
<th>Next Steps</th>
<th>Working Groups</th>
<th>Communications Means established</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>World Social Forum</td>
<td>Consultation</td>
<td>Consultation</td>
<td>Funding identified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gates Foundation</td>
<td>Initial talks</td>
<td>Initial talks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Consultations within GCS networks on the way forward</td>
<td>Follow-up to Waterloo Conversations</td>
<td>Follow-up to Waterloo Conversations</td>
<td>Communications, Sectoral campaigns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Working groups</td>
<td>Piggy-back working groups on existing events</td>
<td>Piggy-back working groups on existing events</td>
<td>Developing GCS agenda</td>
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<td></td>
<td>G-8 in Germany</td>
<td>Developing GCS agenda</td>
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<td>Year</td>
<td>Event Description</td>
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<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Regional Preparatory meetings</td>
<td>Developing Action Plans</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mapping Division of labour</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Global Gathering of GCS Leaders- “The World We Want”</td>
<td>Agreement to hold global gathering of CS in 2010</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Agreement on “venue”- process of continual alliance building</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Review of UN MDGs</td>
<td>Full involvement of GCS networks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Preparation for GCS Summit</td>
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<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Global Civil Society Summit (10,000+)</td>
<td>Involvement of market and government partners</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Agreements to create “Venue” for Global Civil Society</td>
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**From Violence to Well-being**

As the *venue* for GCS began to undertake various campaigns aimed at generating consensus against intra and inter-state violence, it became possible for many governments, municipalities, businesses and media groups to campaign together for a peaceful, just and humane world that all citizens want. The campaigns of GCS were being increasingly facilitated through the *venue*, where norms and procedures for mutual cooperation, negotiation & support had become operational.

The planetary constellations in 2016 have thus become such that the *venue* has been mandated to lead GCS campaigns with the following principles:

1. Any violation of global rules of law anywhere on the planet, caused by actions of governments or other agencies, forces and mechanisms, was unacceptable by citizens of the world. These had to be countered by mobilizing GCS in a manner that is multi-layered, inclusive and transparent.

2. GCS mobilizations capitalize on strong existing public support to civil society, mindful of earlier criticisms of its legitimacy and accountability dilemmas; its approach to such
campaigns is rooted in its experience of conscientisation as a methodology of civic resistance and renewal.

3. In undertaking these campaigns, the venue follows a multi-stakeholder methodology which helps to build stakes of other powerful actors in the campaign; such an approach helps to enhance the momentum of the campaign such that campaign against violence and violations of global rules of law become symbols of generosity & well-being.

Thus GCS venue for a peaceful & just world becomes a vehicle for the promotion of global well-being through campaigns against violence in society caused by governments and other agencies and forces, nationally and globally.
Endnotes


6 Metaka 2000, op. cit., Smillie (2007), op. cit