FOGAR MEETINGS WITH UNITED NATIONS DELEGATIONS
1ST-2ND NOVEMBER 2007, NEW YORK

- MINUTES -

1. Participants:
See annexed lists (FOGAR list and United Nations list).

2. Meeting with Mr Dervis, UNDP Administrator
The first day began with a meeting between the Presidents and a number of Secretaries General of FOGAR member networks and Mr Dervis, UNDP Administrator, who welcomed them to the United Nations Organisation and in particular to the UNDP.

3. Meeting with the UNDP delegation
The discussions that had begun with Mr Dervis then continued with the full FOGAR delegation, which was able to exchange views with a delegation from the UNDP, made up of Resident Representatives for Europe, Africa, and Latin America, thematic coordinators, and others (see annexe).

Mr Jenks first of all recalled the roles of the UNDP and the partners with which the programme works; these range from national governments down to local authorities, the programme being strongly committed to the principle of multi-level governance. The United Nations Organisation’s principal mission is peace-keeping, and Mr Jenks explained how UNDP contributes to this through its programmes, which focus on improving governance processes.

Mr Martini, President of the FOGAR, gave a presentation of the network to those present, and opened the discussion on possible areas of cooperation. The UNDP was not a centralised organisation, explained its representative; the majority of its actions were carried out at grass-roots level, and what was needed was to find the points of entry whereby FOGAR member regions and UNDP programmes could work together. The UNDP was aware that working with the Regions was fundamental, but it was difficult to organise this in a strategic manner, and this was why he welcomed the FOGAR initiative which should help to “simplify” and structure their collaboration. The European Regions had over the years established a joint working relationship with the European Commission’s DG for Regional Policy. The UNDP was interested in this process and the practical experience of working at regional level.

Mr Jones, in charge of governance, said that 40% of UNDP’s work was related to governance policies. He underlined the ever-increasing priority given to decentralisation. Demand for this came from the grass roots level, not from the UNDP itself. The team as a whole agreed that UNDP’s strength lay in its capacity to apply its knowledge locally and in this context it supported the increasing priority to be given to working with the regions.

The environment and in particular climate change were also crucial issues, and in this context the idea of a convergence between UNDP and FOGAR programmes appeared to be a real possibility. The nrg4SD
The importance of the Regions’ action in the area of climate change, and supported the idea of working with the developing countries. The Northern Forum presented its network’s objectives, and underlined the absolute necessity of working on the theme of climate change.

Concerning possible ideas for working together in Africa, support for institutional capacity-building, especially at regional and local level, appeared to be one of the serious avenues to be explored by UNDP and the Regions, in the framework of implementation of good governance.

FOGAR’s Latin-American participants, for their part, stressed that these themes of good governance and exchanges of good practice, notably with regard to the roles of regional authorities, were of great interest to their continent.

Mr Gizard considered that in the same way as there were environmental and social standards at global level, it was necessary to work towards the introduction of territorial standards. An examination of the possibilities of transferring European cohesion policy could be a first step in this direction.

Mr Van Nistelrooij offered to share the experience of the European Border Regions network, the “oldest” network in the EU, with the other participants. When carrying out projects between Regions, one quickly came up against the need to work across national borders. In this context, the experience of the AEBR could be very useful at a global level.

The UNDP’s main areas of work were reiterated in the discussion: democratic governance, combating poverty, and implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the environment and energy, and prevention of conflicts. These themes were implemented in the countries in which UNDP worked, so that it could organise its activities with the whole range of partners: national governments, local and regional authorities, the private sector, political parties, and NGOs. In order to work in as coherent a framework as possible, UNDP was particularly interested in the exchange of knowledge, and organised “knowledge fairs”.

The need to diversify sources of funding for development was also mentioned, and in this framework the Regions could also represent a new source.

The role of national governments and the support they should give their Regions was also discussed, and FOGAR members counted on the UNDP to pass on the message to governments so that they would support regionalisation. A good regional governance was a means to support national governance and, ultimately, democracy.

Other themes addressed included cultural diversity, human rights, strengthening democracy and the importance of the Regions’ role in this context. If the United Nations showed strong support for decentralisation, it would be difficult for governments not to follow the trend.

Two programmes in particular were mentioned: the UNCDP (United Nations Capital Development Fund) which undertakes actions in rural areas in Least Developed Countries, and the GEF (Global Environment Facility) the aim of which is to minimise the investment risks in sustainable development and to increase the profitability of programmes aiming to reduce carbon production. These two programmes are keen to initiate partnerships with the Regions.

In the discussion, Mr Martini underlined the importance of developing two equally important aspects of FOGAR’s collaboration with UNDP at the same time: on the one hand, developing theoretical reflections on the place of the Regions in globalisation, and, on the other hand, implementing concrete projects at grassroots level via the networks and their member Regions. He proposed that the Memorandum of Understanding signed by CPMR and UNDP be extended to all FOGAR member networks. He welcomed the avenues they had started to explore during the morning’s discussions.
4. Meeting with Mr Nikhil Seth, Director, Office for ECOSOC Support and Coordination

The Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) is one of the main bodies of the United Nations. It passes on to the General Secretariat the questions, needs, and demands emanating from civil society and NGOs. One of its principal priorities is sustainable development. Throughout 2008 there will be a special focus on health issues.

For several years, ECOSOC has organised an annual Development Cooperation Forum, held in July. This is intended to permit exchanges and debates on a variety of issues. It also aims to develop public/private partnerships, promote philanthropy and also, more recently, the participation of the Regions. In this framework, working with FOGAR would give ECOSOC a better understanding of the reality of decentralised cooperation. This theme, as well as the implementation of the MDGs, would appear to be the most appropriate points of entry for a joint ECOSOC-FOGAR approach.

These themes struck a definite chord with FOGAR network members, and they were particularly interested in exchanges of experience on health, education or nomadic populations (Northern Forum), and sustainable development (nrg4SD).

Mr Seth stressed that the Development Cooperation Forum was not a traditional forum but rather a space for exchanging experiences. ECOSOC is a mechanism enabling dialogue between all partners within the United Nations, and carrying out analyses; UNDP is then responsible for implementation in the field. The United Nations carries out three kinds of tasks: analysis of situations, setting-up of political processes, and lastly implementation in the field. ECOSOC does not have a formal presence at local/regional level.

The question of the status of local and regional authorities within ECOSOC was raised. Although they can obtain NGO status, they are in fact political bodies, usually elected, and therefore should really be considered as IGOs (Intergovernmental Organisations). In response, Mr Seth stressed that a difference had to be made between the formal level, obtaining NGO status with ECOSOC, and what happened in practice. It was of utmost importance for the Regions that wished to make their voices heard to also lobby their respective national governments.

The AEBR offered to put its successful experience in the regionalisation of Europe, including at the level of cross-border working, at the service of the UN. The Northern Forum regretted that national governments remained, so it seemed, the principal gateway for making the demands of the regions heard, because the regions often have the impression that their governments do not listen to them. The UN should have a more open approach to the regional phenomenon.

Ms Essop raised the question of the synergies that could be developed between the United Nations and the regional level concerning the issue of sustainable development. It was important to find effective ways of working together.

On this question, ECOSOC was keen to promote the action taken by the Regions, so that national governments would take inspiration from it.

Mr Martini referred again to FOGAR’s dual approach; it had to argue its cause with the United Nations in order to obtain a real recognition of the Regions - in this framework he proposed to draw up a basic document on this principle to be promoted at the United Nations - and this role had to find a concrete application especially in the economic and social fields. It was vitally important to recognise the role of the Regions, since this was the only means by which the principles defended by the UN could be made coherent with reality on the ground. This could not be done without the Regions, he said, and the Regions could not be considered to be on the same level as the private sector or NGOs, which today have greater recognition as UN partners.

Mr Seth acknowledged that an enormous amount of work remained to be done, since this approach went against the UN’s usual working methods, but he was convinced that progress was being made, especially
via ECOSOC’s regional meetings which follow the same themes as the general meetings and which enable specific geographical situations to be taken into account.

5. Meeting with Mr Jomo Kwame Sundaram, Assistant-Secretary-General for Economic Development, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (representing Mr Zukang Sha, Under-Secretary-General)

After listening to the presentation about the FOGAR, Mr Jomo Kwame Sundaram presented the Department of Economic and Social Affairs. The work of the United Nations General Secretariat is structured around three areas: political affairs, humanitarian affairs, and economic and social affairs. In the framework of economic and social affairs, the areas studied are social development, ageing of the population, disability, indigenous peoples, migration, population studies, statistics, and sustainable development. Under this heading there is a particular focus on water, energy resources, and climate change. Cartography and statistics represent an important part of the work carried out by the department. Mr Sha’s representative underlined the interest in working together with the Regions and their networks in order to ensure that their statistics reflected reality as closely as possible.

Mr Kwame Sundaram did not hide the fact that working together with regional authorities implied certain difficulties, notably because of the reticence of national governments. However, he acknowledged that this aspect was becoming more important and that this would be reflected in particular during the Bali summit on sustainable development. He welcomed the FOGAR’s offer of services, which he would take into account, but he had to admit that the department was more used to working with NGOs and that the relationship would need to be built up taking account of the department’s very limited resources.

6. Meeting with Mr Dalius Cekuolis, Ambassador for Lithuania, President of the Economic and Social Council

Ambassador Cekuolis presented ECOSOC and its method of working. He stressed the importance of the annual ministerial review in March, which is ECOSOC’s main meeting. The main part of the Council’s work is devoted to preparing this session (the agenda is discussed during three months on average) and taking follow-up action. Until 2005, ECOSOC was a relatively discreet, “hidden” structure, but from that date on it was given a clearer mandate in order that it should become one of the pillars of the reform of the United Nations.

Mr Cekuolis mentioned the Development Cooperation Forums, which are intended to strengthen the Council’s links with stakeholders, and he hoped in particular in this framework to work with FOGAR which could be a very important ally for ECOSOC in bringing theoretical considerations closer to the grass roots reality and helping to implement them in a tangible form. He thought that FOGAR could be a very useful tool in making the voice of a wide range of citizens heard at the United Nations. It should be an instrument for communication and for implementation.

Mr Martini supported this proposal and emphasised the partnership to be established between the Regions and the United Nations. Mr Gizard referred again to the success of cohesion policy in the European Union which, thanks to a long-term partnership between the European Commission, Member States and Regions, had enabled the construction of an enlarged Europe in which solidarity between the territories was beneficial to all. He proposed that the theme of transferring this policy at global level be discussed at one of the future Development Cooperation Forums. Mr Cekuolis approved this idea.

Ambassador Merores, who will become President of ECOSOC in 2008, was not able to attend this meeting. He did however join the lunch hosted by FOGAR on 2 November and this gave him an opportunity to hear about the Forum’s work and its objectives.
7. Meeting with Mr Munir Akram, Chairman of the Group of 77

Ambassador Akram is a former President of ECOSOC. He explained the principles of the Group of 77 and their interest in bringing forward the needs of the grass roots level, of populations, at the United Nations. In this perspective he was particularly interested in FOGAR’s objectives and the fact that the organisation included Regions from both developed and developing countries. Concerning areas of work on which an active cooperation between FOGAR and the Group of 77 would be possible, his attention was held in particular by the themes of climate change and the participation of the Regions in a successful globalisation at the service of citizens. It was suggested that FOGAR prepare a document, which could then be discussed within the Group of 77, on the role of the Regions in development strategies. The main conclusion of the discussion was the importance for the United Nations in general to make use of the Regions as instruments for implementing its objectives.

8. Meeting with Ms Alice Hecht, Head of Protocol for the Secretary-General Mr Ban Ki-moon

This meeting was intended above all to present FOGAR to Ms Hecht together with the message that it wished to convey to the United Nations, i.e. its desire to make the Regions known to the United Nations, to understand the working of the United Nations and how the Regions could become integrated into it, and to offer the services of these same Regions as tools in the implementation of the main aims of the United Nations.

Ms Hecht welcomed the initiative and welcomed FOGAR members. She stressed that the organisation needed to make its objectives very clear and precise, and said she thought that from then on the work of persuasion would be “relatively” easy as far as the United Nations were concerned. She remained at FOGAR’s disposal for the future.

9. Meeting with Mr Parfait Onanga-Anyanga, special adviser to Dr Asha-Rose Migiro, Deputy Secretary-General

First of all Mr Onanga-Anyanga wished to offer Dr Migiro’s apologies; she had had to leave for Ethiopia and was therefore unable to receive the delegation.

The meeting provided an opportunity to review and present the initial conclusions of the two days of meetings to the Deputy Secretary-General’s department. After making a presentation about FOGAR, Mr Martini came back to one point in particular, underlining the difference between NGOs, with which the UN is used to working, and the Regions, which are definitely intergovernmental organisations, regional governments and local public authorities, representing all citizens rather than pressure groups or special interest groups. The participants also mentioned the future Convention to be held in Tanger-Tétouan which would be an opportunity to review and examine the progress of relations between the Regions and the United Nations, the recognition at global level of local and regional authorities and their role in the implementation of development policies. Mr Benallal evoked the participation of the United Nations General Secretariat at the Tanger-Tétouan convention, at which the Regions, States, European Union, and UNDP would be present. The presence of the UN General Secretariat at this meeting would be a strong signal on the part of the United Nations.

Having thanked the speakers, Mr Onanga-Anyanga referred once again to the principal missions of the United Nations Organisation: peace, security, development, human rights; and reaffirmed that its principal interlocutors were and would remain national governments. However, he recognised the particularly innovative nature of FOGAR’s approach, and encouraged its members to pursue and strengthen their work with both UNDP and ECOSOC. He also reminded them of the importance of continuing to lobby member states of the UN individually.

In conclusion, the representatives of the General Secretariat took note of the invitation to the Tanger-Tétouan meeting, and wished the FOGAR and its members every success.
10. Meeting of the FOGAR Bureau

Record of decisions:

- logo 7b was adopted.
- Members needed more time to study the proposed Charter. It was decided to set the deadline date for sending amendments at 30 November 2007.
- The next meeting of the FOGAR Bureau will take place in Brussels on 7 and 8 February 2008. The Agenda will include: finalisation of the preparation of the 2nd Convention for a territorial approach to development to be held in Tanger-Tétouan (12-14 May 2008), a discussion on the Forum’s budget, and the finalisation of FOGAR’s Charter.
- The first day will be devoted to the work of the Forum; on the second day member networks will be able to meet key members of the European institutions (Commission, Parliament, Committee of the Regions) and give presentations about FOGAR as was done during the days at the UN.

Mr Gizard informed the Bureau that the CPMR had obtained additional contributions on the part of a certain number of its members in order to pursue the launch of the network. However, any additional financial contributions from other FOGAR members would be welcome. He called on the other networks therefore to make a contribution to help finance FOGAR.