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## CHAPTER IV

### **NGOs as a Force for Civilian Power: How the "Associational Revolution" is Changing the World**

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When Nelson Mandela visited Washington last fall for the first time since his election as president of the revitalized Republic of South Africa, he was awarded two prizes, one at a fund-raising dinner hosted by AFRICARE and the other at a similar function put on by the Hunger Project.

AFRICARE is the oldest and largest aid organization set up and supported mainly by African Americans. The Hunger Project, meanwhile, has been operating for almost twenty years and awards the Africa Prize for Leadership for the Sustainable End of Hunger. Some 1,500 guests, including President Bill Clinton, attended the Hunger Project dinner at \$500 per person. Both host bodies are nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and both worked consistently to oppose South Africa's former apartheid system and support the movement led by Mandela. Few causes, if any, have united so many NGOs throughout the world as did the movement to free Mandela, nor have any demonstrated the power of NGOs so well as did the dramatic finale of his eventual release. The fact that Mandela earned the position of guest of honor at two state dinners was a hot topic for a while in Washington, but it reflects only a tiny fraction of the much greater changes that are taking place in the international community at large.

## I. Upheaval in the Diplomatic Establishment

The rise of NGOs, and particularly of international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) whose activities transcend national borders, has now become a threat to the established authority of international politics. This phenomenon is part and parcel of the same changes that have been rocking the diplomatic establishment since the end of the cold war.

In the United States, diplomacy throughout the cold war era followed the “patented” guidance of what international politics scholar Michael Clough calls the “Harvard-Manhattan-Foggy Bottom Circuit.” Foreign policy, that is, was formulated within the “triangle” formed by eminent Harvard University graduates, top New York corporate lawyers, and the State Department (called the Foggy Bottom after the area where its offices are situated). Leading “wise men” like Dean Acheson, Clark Clifford, George Kennan, John McCloy, and McGeorge Bundy not only racked their brains framing “containment” policies toward the Soviet Union but also joined forces to “contain” various domestic political pressures and outside elements that threatened national security.<sup>1</sup>

Things have changed considerably since then. The “wise men” making an impact on policy today are people like Sidney Jones of Human Rights Watch, Asia; John Hamond of Oxfam America; Peggy Carlin of the Center for Development and Population Activities (CEDPA); Lionel Rosenblat of Refugees International; William Walsh of Project HOPE (Health Opportunity for People Everywhere); and Joan Holmes of the Hunger Project.

Perhaps it is appropriate to add to this list former president Jimmy Carter, active now through the Carter Center. This international nongovernmental organization, led by Carter, undertakes activities in a wide range of fields, such as environmental protection, development, refugee aid, and peace keeping, and has made the United Nations and its member countries sit up and pay attention.

Nor is America the only source of such activity. The array of new Wise Men appearing on the international political stage of the nineties also includes Bernard Cushunier [we were unable to confirm the romanized spelling of this name when translating this article from Japanese.] and Loni Brouman of the France-based *Medecins sans Frontiers* (MSF); Anika Koss, who conducts relief activities in Slovenia for refugees from the Bosnian war;

Emmanuelle Ralier, a devoted leader in a health and medicine project in Ghana; Denise Muchungugi, who is carrying out an agricultural development scheme in Tanzania; Majeed Njai of Senegal, who heads African development forum FAVDO; Carmen Lazarus, who works to promote child education in Jamaica; Nina Belaeva of the Interlegal Education and Information Center, the nucleus of Russian intellectual networks; and, in Japan, Tadashi Yamamoto, president of the Japan Center for International Exchange, which coordinates private-sector intellectual exchange between Japan and Europe and the United States, between Japan and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and between Japan and the Republic of Korea.

All of the organizations just mentioned are nonprofit, nongovernmental organizations. Working in a broad range of areas, including environmental protection, human rights, development, refugee aid, education, and women's rights, such organizations dispatch teams all over the world to conduct surveys of local conditions that become the basis of proposals they formulate and submit to the relevant governments for implementation. Some also form coalitions with local NGOs in the counterpart countries concerned, thereby helping expand the global NGO network. NGOs endeavor not only to directly lobby their own governments but also to exert external pressure on policy makers.

Their power is that of influence rather than of authority. In a jointly written article, Henry Kissinger and Cyrus Vance,<sup>2</sup> both former U.S. secretaries of state, wrote that over the past twenty years, both the legislature and the mass media have come to play an even more powerful role in the formulation and implementation of American foreign policy. Today the same may now be said of NGOs as well. Professor Richard Norton of Boston University goes so far as to say that Amnesty International is probably more powerful than ninety percent of the world's governments. Its capture of the 1988 Nobel Peace Prize testifies to the increasing international recognition of this influence exerted by NGOs. Many NGOs, such as International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (also a winner of the Nobel Peace Prize), Medecins sans Frontiers, and Save the Children are significantly more active and effective than either national governments or the United Nations in meeting specific, pressing needs.

## II. The Rise of NGO Power

The emergence of NGOs as a major force is occurring not only in the United States but all over the world. In France, some 54,000 NGOs were established in 1987 alone, an explosive increase over the annual average until the mid-1980s of around 11,000. In Britain, there are now about 275,000 registered charitable institutions, representing as much as five percent of GNP. Forty percent of NGOs operating in Italy were set up after 1977, while Germany and the Netherlands have similarly become leading NGO countries.

The relative role of nonprofit bodies in providing social services is also increasing. In *The Emerging Sector*,<sup>3</sup> published as part of the Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project being conducted at Johns Hopkins University, co-authors Lester Salamon and Helmut Anheier reveal that a third of children attending childcare centers in Germany and as many as four in five sports club members in France are utilizing nonprofit facilities. The list goes on: 95 percent of orchestras in the United States, 77 percent of universities and colleges in Japan, 10 percent of housing in Britain, and 22 percent of kindergartens in Italy are operated on a nonprofit basis.

The growth of the nonprofit sector is even more spectacular in developing countries. In Brazil, the number of nonprofit organizations has reached some 45,000 in Sao Paulo alone, 16,000 in Rio de Janeiro, and 200,000 nationwide. Egypt boasts 20,000, while 11,000 are operating in Thailand.<sup>4</sup>

The Indian environmental protection organization CHIPKO grew out of forestry preservation protests in which villagers linked hands around large trees to block loggers. In Latin America, the activities of grassroots NGOs are centered around the Catholic clergy. AFRICARE is implementing a program to promote rural economic development in Zimbabwe. In Jamaica, the Conservation Law Foundation is furthering an energy conservation scheme. Some 23,000 women's groups are active in Kenya. Majeed Njai of Senegal organized thirty-five African NGOs to attend a U.N. conference in 1986, and the following year formed the African development forum of NGOs (AAVDO), active in thirty-six of the fifty-two nations on the African continent.

NGOs are also developing rapidly in countries formerly part of the Soviet Union and the East European socialist bloc. Numerous environmental groups appeared in the Soviet Union in the wake of the Chernobyl nuclear

power disaster. By 1992, the number of foundations registered in Poland was in the thousands, and some 6,000 foundations and 11,000 grassroots groups were registered in Hungary. In Bulgaria, Foundation Forum was established, bringing together about thirty newly launched NGOs. The 1993 U.N. Report on Human Development calling this situation an explosion of direct action movements and NGOs is no exaggeration.

The U.N. General Assembly has adopted a resolution allowing NGOs to intervene in the domestic affairs of sovereign states when their aims are humanitarian. To protect NGOs engaged in humanitarian relief activities in Bosnia-Herzegovina, it also passed Resolution 770, which does not exclude the use of military force.

Under pressure from NGOs grappling with environmental problems, even the World Bank has expressed the view that the explosive emergence of NGOs has made them collectively a major actor in development activities, and since 1989 has itself been conducting environmental impact studies on development projects carried out under its support. In the mid-1980s, only five World Bank personnel were permanently stationed throughout the world to oversee environmental impact studies; today there are more than two hundred. International organizations can no longer ignore the scale of NGO influence.

Perhaps the U.N. body most closely tied to NGOs is the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). Oxfam, International Rescue Committee (IRC), CARE, CONCERN, CARITAS, Red Crescent Society, Medecins sans Frontiers, and other NGOs have established close partnerships with the UNHCR in such areas as medicine, sanitation, and water services. To administer these tie-ups, the UNHCR has a special division for NGO liaison and spends about a quarter of its annual budget of \$1.3 billion on NGO activities. In addition, the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) has allowed NGOs to participate in its operations in an observer capacity.

Networking among NGOs themselves is also gathering momentum rapidly. Today, some 4,600 NGOs from industrially advanced countries are involved in cooperative assistance programs with around 20,000 counterpart organizations in the developing world, and foundations from the United States and elsewhere are supporting these networks with financial aid.

Lester Salamon dubs this burgeoning of NGO power a global-scale "as-

sociational revolution.”<sup>25</sup> The catalyst for this revolution was the U.N. Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, which brought together over 20,000 NGO personnel from around the world. These NGO representatives did more than network among themselves at Rio; as delegates from the world’s governments drafted Agenda 21 and the Rio Declaration, the NGO group formulated its own “Alternative Treaty.” On the solid basis of their hands-on experience and firm sense of mission, these NGOs thus began a renewed effort aimed at creating “this one and gentler earth,” including the formulation of treaties regarding the norms of NGO activities and the nature of networks. With this, the International NGO Forum (INGOF) was born.

### III. Background of the Rise of NGOs

Key changes both within individual societies and throughout the international community as a whole during the 1960s and especially the 1970s were crucial elements behind the later empowerment of NGOs.

#### 1. Changes in the social structures of individual countries

In the industrially advanced countries around this time, and from the 1980s in developing countries as well, the expanding middle class, nurtured by steady economic growth, became the basis of widespread social stability. At the same time, people grew dissatisfied with the existing organizational channels of social and political participation through elections, political parties, and labor unions, and began seeking more direct routes to shaping their world. In addition, the middle class gained greatly increased access to higher education, one result of which was many more people with transnational college experience. Within that trend, western universities provided an important global intellectual network. Consequently, many of today’s NGO leaders in developing countries have studied at western universities.

Employment conditions in the industrial countries also underwent considerable change during this period. As the population of farmers and miners decreased sharply on the one hand, there was a noticeable shift in the

labor force from government organs and business corporations to nonprofit organizations on the other hand.

One of the first to consider this economic and social trend toward nonprofit activities from a point of view of management study is Peter Drucker. In *The Management of Nonprofit Organizations*,<sup>6</sup> in which he analyzes that trend primarily as it unfolds in the United States, he asserts that today, unlike forty years ago, nonprofit organizations occupy the center stage of American society and are one of its strikingly distinctive features, and furthermore that the ability of governments to fulfill their social obligations is now seriously limited. One in every two adult Americans works three hours or more each week as a volunteer in the nonprofit sector.

## 2. Economic interdependence and the advance of mass media

The period in question also saw the broadening and deepening of international economic interdependence. Then came greater direct contact between different societies and the appearance of mutual dependence and a sense of single community among them. Countries in Western Europe (Germany, the Netherlands) and Scandinavia (Sweden, Norway) led the world in this move toward economic and social interdependence, both systems in any given country becoming increasingly sensitive to conditions in partner countries. It has become necessary for policy makers in one country to carefully consider the external impact of even domestic policies as they formulate and adopt them. It is no accident, then, that NGOs in these countries are very active and highly influential. For years there has been an increasing awareness there that, wherever they occur, problems concerning the environment, human rights, refugees, women's rights, and so on are the common concern of all people in the region.

This community attitude was further honed, both in electronic and real-time terms, by the galloping progress of information transfer through television, film, and computer networks. The world now has an estimated one billion television sets and some 370 communications satellites linking 137 countries. During negotiations over the North American Free Trade Agreement, environmental groups from Canada, Mexico, and the United States joined forces to advance the environmental point of view on the pact. A

Canadian NGO obtained a copy of the draft agreement and e-mailed it to an environmental organization in Mexico, which in turn gave a copy to Mexican legislators concerned in environmental affairs. They then reconsidered the content of the agreement, pressed for stronger regulations to protect the environment, and eventually succeeded in having these incorporated into the final version.<sup>7</sup>

It is difficult to imagine the international outcry that followed the Tiananmen Square incident without the coverage of the event by the news giant CNN. This coverage also sparked the subsequent movement within the United States, led by Human Rights Watch Asia and other NGOs, to protect human rights in China. Holly Bacorda, Human Rights Watch Asia's Washington representative, stated that this is the issue on which the group has best been able to display the extent of its influence. In 1990 it began lobbying the U.S. Congress to adopt a bill tying China's human rights performance to its most-favored-nation status; that aim was fulfilled when the Clinton administration adopted such a policy. (The Clinton government reverted to a policy de-linking the two issues in May 1994.) Efforts by NGOs to help refugees from Somalia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Rwanda have also been greatly strengthened by the support of ordinary citizens all over the world who enjoy access to the expanding global media network.

### 3. The weakening of ideology and the advent of "soft" power

Changes in the international setting have also been conducive to NGO activities. "Civil society" was the rallying cry of reformists in the former Czechoslovakia as they rose during the Velvet Revolution in 1989. By this event, the civil society sent a message to the former Marxist and Communist Party regime, which had long advocated and implemented the forced solidarity of society, proclaiming the restoration of citizen's rights and the arrival of NGOs as the vehicles of that renewed power. The rapid expansion of NGOs in the former socialist countries, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe, after the collapse of communist party rule must be viewed in this context.

At the height of the cold war, NGOs were regarded with suspicion by both the rightist and leftist camps. From the political Right they were seen



as anti-government organizations, agents of the Left bent on opposing everything the government did, while from the Left they were treated as part of the degenerate New Left which simply denied the role of government and took exception to everything.

In the case of the United States, with its long history of debate between conservatives and liberals over “big government” versus “small government,” conservative governments have deliberately ignored the very existence of NGOs in order to further their claim that excessive government at the hands of the liberals interferes in all areas of social activity and so smothers the civil society. Liberal administrations, meanwhile, have ignored them because even to acknowledge them would be to admit the failure of their vaunted social welfare policies and give credence to criticisms raised against those policies. (Lester Salamon describes this as the conservative and liberal camps’ curious conspiracy of silence.)

Today, ideologically inspired opposition to the idea of the welfare state is alive and well, but now it is less likely to target the government’s welfare policies themselves than simply criticize the scale or cost of the services provided. The Left and the Right (assuming it is still appropriate to call them such) are much alike in that both are affected by the heavy pressures of fiscal deficit in bankrolling the welfare state. During his term in office, Republican President Bush hailed the country’s volunteers as “thousands of points of light;” under Democrat Clinton’s administration, too, when Anthony Lake, presidential aide on national security, revealed the government’s “enlargement” policy to promote human rights and democracy, he stressed the importance of the role of citizens’ groups, including NGOs, in the process of “vertical enlargement.”

This new attitude betrays a desire to treat NGOs more as partners, a view most explicitly put forward by Joseph Nie, U.S. assistant undersecretary of defense and former Harvard professor, in his theory of “soft power.” The saber-rattling kind of power of the past he calls “hard power.” “Soft power,” on the other hand, is that wielded by a country that develops its ability to advance its diplomatic ideal and national interests through international organizations and conciliatory policies, fosters a society people in other countries would like to emulate, and has a government other countries feel they can depend on for assistance and advice. Considering the great depth and high standards of American universities, research institutions, nonprofit

foundations, think tanks, and NGOs, Nic astutely pinpointed that “soft power” as the source of the United States’ new dynamic force in the post-cold war world.

France was even quicker in incorporating this “soft” approach into its domestic and foreign policy. Limited in terms of both pure military strength (hard power) and economic sway—the other key form of power—France has consistently invoked its cultural influence in framing national policy, and NGOs have long been given a significant role to play in that process. The efforts of President Mitterand and his wife Daniele to promote NGOs are well known, Daniele also being the founder of the France Liberté Daniele Mitterand Fund set up to tackle the spread of AIDS in Africa, among other problems.

#### 4. Consciousness of solidarity transcending national boundaries

Economic interdependence has promoted the development of a “borderless” international community, which has in turn encouraged NGOs to pursue activities that transcend national boundaries. During the cold war, the development crises and issues of the endangered environment were subsumed under the high politics of nuclear brinkmanship. Once the cold war ended, these problems came into sudden prominence, and the inability of national governments to fully address them has energized NGOs.

In the cold war period, the two superpowers fought “proxy wars” in developing countries and provided economic assistance to the countries that belonged to their respective camps. Now that this support has ended, however, we have begun to see the emergence of “failed countries” in Africa, Central Asia, and other areas where ecosystems are being destroyed and from which huge numbers of refugees seek escape.

Just as the issue of environmental contamination by radioactive wastes was swept under the rug by both the United States and the Soviet Union during the cold war years, environmental problems in general were subordinated to security policies. Today, however, this situation has greatly changed. The popular fear instilled by the nuclear accident at Chernobyl in 1986 transcended national boundaries, severely shaking the cold war struc-

ture. The silence maintained throughout by the former Soviet, Czech, and other socialist governments concerning the accident, as well as their dissemination of false information, pushed popular distrust beyond a critical point; the anti-nuclear and environmental movements, as well as the activities of NGOs in former socialist countries gained much increased momentum.

One characteristic of post-cold war international politics is the rise of conflicts rooted in people's fear of new threats caused by development and environmental problems, which are proving to be beyond the reach of the old international system. It was the *Medecins sans Frontiers* program that went in first to help the refugees who fled Rwanda; similarly, it was NGO activists such as Slovenia's Anika Koss and the Czech Republic's Jiri Chara [we were unable to confirm the romanized spelling of these names when translating this article from Japanese] who assisted the Bosnian refugees.

Traditional perceptions of national authority have changed as people have become more conscious of their interdependence and commonality. Building on the idea of a "global commons" as recognized by the United Nations Maritime Treaty, old concepts of absolute and exclusionist national sovereignty are having to be revised in new treaties dealing with meteorology and biodiversity. The resolution passed by the U.N. General Assembly in 1991 concerning humanitarian aid clearly states that such aid can only be implemented with the consent of the affected country. The use of the words "affected country" instead of "affected country's government," and the absence of the need for a "request" from that government, mark a change in how national sovereignty is viewed. Perhaps the most dramatic example of this change is UNTAC (United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia), which was charged with maintaining peace, holding elections, settling refugees, reconstructing the government, and protecting human rights in Cambodia.

## 5. Revitalization of the United Nations

Another factor deeply connected with the developments discussed above is the post-cold war revitalization of the United Nations, which is in turn closely bound up with the full-scale emergence of NGOs.

With the breakdown of the bipolar world defined by the superpowers, both the United States and Russia are rationalizing their global strategies, and find they can no longer avoid using the United Nations. Both countries are discovering the benefits of a revitalized United Nations, just as Great Britain did when it gave the United Nations responsibility for the Palestinian problem and other intractable issues that resulted from the dismantling of the British Empire. Hopes for a stronger United Nations are also high among former socialist countries and other nations that have been newly formed or reformed. Furthermore, all the major issues of the post-cold war period—including human rights, peacekeeping, the environment, population, development, refugees, and women's rights—are well suited to the world organization's role; this is in contrast to the life-and-death negotiations previously conducted by the superpowers concerning nuclear arms reduction, peace in the Middle East, and other issues in which the United Nations had almost no role.

Many of today's problems are more directly related to people's everyday lives, and are within the easy reach of NGOs. Particularly for such issues as the environment and refugees, NGOs supplement the often inadequate and outdated information of the huge U.N. bureaucracy; their cooperative relationship will therefore become increasingly essential in the future. Until very recently, the relationship between the United Nations and NGOs was colored by mutual distrust and contempt.

U.N. personnel referring to the activities of NGO staff used the term "nongovernmental" with a sense of wariness, as if to keep such organizations at a distance. Their usage of the term also betrayed a psychology of self-preservation against outside forces that seemed to meddle in anything they did.

Organizations such as ECOSOC (U.N. Economic and Social Council) and UNESCO (U.N. Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization) recognized the value of "discussion" with NGOs from the outset. The historical precedent for this was established by the prewar League of Nations, which encouraged all member countries to cooperate with the International Red Cross. Unfortunately, however, the "We the People" principle championed in the preamble of the U.N. Charter was laid aside, leading to the entrenchment of national sovereignty; as a result, cooperation with NGOs never developed.

The first signs of change in this attitude came in such meetings as the

World Food Conference in 1974 and the Second Special Session of the U.N. Assembly on Disarmament in 1982. In both cases, NGO representatives were permitted to speak at the meetings, allowing them to slowly build up their influence in forums that can be considered U.N. "public opinion." However, it was not until the second half of the 1980s that NGOs achieved the transition from being used by the United Nations to using the United Nations. In some cases, this did not occur until after the cold war ended.

In 1985, the World Conference on the United Nations Decade for Women was held in Nairobi, Kenya. This was probably the first conference where a cooperative framework was established by the United Nations and NGOs. Parallel to the official meetings attended by government representatives from 150 countries, meetings were held among some 13,000 NGO members, who reported actual conditions in the field and presented proposals. Since then, there has been a clear tendency for the United Nations to mobilize NGOs, especially to deal with development problems in Africa. The Earth Summit (UNCED) held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, should be remembered as the event that raised U.N. recognition of NGOs onto a new plane. Agenda 21, adopted then, designated NGOs, along with corporations, labor unions, women's groups, and other organizations, as "Major Groups" with which U.N. cooperation would be pursued. According to Erskine Childers and Brian Urquhart, the agreement reached at the summit was made possible by the obstinate pressure exerted on national governments by NGOs.<sup>8</sup>

Over the long term, the relationship between the United Nations and NGOs will likely be debated in conjunction with the establishment of a United Nations Congress and other issues as part of a general effort to "democratize" the world body. Already, however, the strength of NGOs is creating a new dynamic in local regions affected by U.N. operations, as in the following examples:

- 1) The world's 25,000 environmental NGOs are growing increasingly exasperated with the U.N.'s inadequate handling of environmental and development problems, and will continue to form a powerful pressure group.
- 2) Although human rights NGOs had previously distanced themselves from the United Nations, they staged a human rights demonstration at the 1993 U.N. Conference on Human Rights in Vienna.
- 3) People from NGOs engaged in humanitarian aid are increasingly going to the same disaster areas as their U.N. counterparts and, through their

common experiences, are beginning to have input in the actual formulation of U.N. policies. Meanwhile, the U.N. side is beginning to see that NGO participation in planning both humanitarian aid and peacekeeping operations has become indispensable.

- 4) Women's NGOs are emphasizing the United Nation's role in increasing and broadening women's rights, and are fervent about protecting the right of women to speak at the United Nations.<sup>9</sup>

#### IV. The NGO Myth

Despite these positive developments, there are still many issues confronting NGOs. Experts with extensive experience dealing with developmental issues identify the following problems in particular.

- NGOs often lack the ability to recruit and maintain capable staff members. With regard to the developmental field, NGO leaders often find themselves playing the role of agent or manager for international aid organizations, and cease formulating their own developmental policies.
- On the other hand, if NGOs try to free themselves from excessive dependence on aid organizations, they run the risk of losing their own identities, a problem stemming from the dilemma of trying to maintain good relations with those organizations while eliciting the spontaneous and positive involvement of the parties receiving the aid.
- Because aid organizations usually seek to establish some kind of quantifiable target and are not much concerned with the process through which aid is supplied, NGOs are kept busy trying to achieve quantifiable targets and writing reports.
- Practical concerns include the following:
  - 1) When the NGO in question is based in a foreign country, it tends to neglect the originality and spontaneity of local groups;
  - 2) NGOs are often built around a single individual or on mentor-disciple relationships, resulting in a lack of adequate institutional memory; and
  - 3) frequent staff changes result in a lack of continuity.<sup>10</sup>

A deeper problem, however, is the romanticism that surrounds NGOs. Lester Salamon identifies this in terms of three "myths": the embodiment of saintliness and morality, volunteer spirit, and the immaculate conception.

People tend to view NGO activities as the proselytizing work of apostles, and there is an overemphasis on a sense of mission, emotional commitment, and spontaneous participation. Therefore, NGOs often find it difficult to share their experiences and achievements widely with others, and lack the vigor to encourage broader participation, build up an organization, and establish cooperative ties with governments. Salamon also points out that NGOs tend to have an inflated image of themselves as offering the newest in cutting-edge activities, and tend to be ignorant of the wisdom to be found in history and culture, particularly the history and culture of the regions in which they operate.

## **V. On the Front Lines of Civilian Power**

These various problems are generated both from within the NGOs themselves and through their relationships with the nations and societies in which they work. That is, they can be considered problems that permeate the fabric of the civil society on which NGOs are based. This fact became acutely clear about the time the cold war ended. Now, societies in the former socialist countries, the “former” capitalist countries, and in both the North and the South are confronted by the difficult issue of rehabilitating and reconstructing civil society.

In socialist countries during the cold war, every aspect of society was controlled by the state under the one-party authoritarian system of the Communist Party, a system that led only to impoverishment. In capitalist countries, it was the market that exercised “autocratic” control over society. For most of the past fifty years, the United States and the Soviet Union were identical in one respect: both of them created and controlled an entire society that was designed to survive the cold war.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s in the former socialist countries, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe, anti-Establishment intellectuals spearheaded efforts to build a civil society characterized by what Hungarian philosopher Estafan Bibeau called “small circles of freedom.” People began creating forums where they could meet and escape the social domination of the party and the state. In the Central European countries, this movement had roots in society that predated communism, and represented an attempt to rediscover spontaneous, voluntary “civic forums.” In Hun-

gary, some 14,000 voluntary groups, or NGOs, had been formed by 1982, with a combined membership of approximately three million people (out of a total population of 8.6 million).

In Poland, Solidarity and other NGOs focused their activities on the end of the cold war, thus sparking new recognition of the importance of civil society and NGOs. This importance was subsequently reaffirmed from a different perspective during the post-cold war transition period.

Modeled on the politics and economics of the (former) West, the free elections and free markets adopted by the former socialist countries have failed to fully draw out the latent power of the people. Now that the common enemy, the Communist Party, has been eliminated, new problems have arisen, and the newly emerging societies are proving fragile in the face of ethnic chauvinism and exclusionism. Their world is now completely dominated by economics and a belief in the omnipotence of money; no one has the time to meet in the "small circles of freedom" anymore. The creation of a civil society has become a more acute problem.<sup>11</sup>

The (former) capitalist countries have maintained the dominance of the market over society in parallel with the long-standing "security-oriented state" system and militarization of the economy. During the cold war, this was justified by the need for proponents of the market economy to win their global ideological struggle with proponents of the planned economy. Non-ideological doubts about this course of action began surfacing as other problems became evident, including global issues such as environmental degradation and the population explosion; the appalling political corruption found in countries like Japan and Italy, where conservative parties have held the reins of power for long periods of time; and the worsening of problems such as crime, drugs, and the disintegration of the family in countries such as the United States. Thus, in the West as well as in the former socialist countries, the invigoration of civil society has become a major issue in the post-cold war era.

In the poor countries of the South, in Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East, interest in the roles of civil society and NGOs is also on the rise. Particularly in the former colonies in Africa, where political reforms were implemented as part of the independence process, many critics have pointed out that governments are spinning their wheels without being connected to the societies they purportedly serve. Multiparty elections do not necessarily result in democracy; nor do they in themselves achieve wider



popular participation in the political process. Also, although democracy is often introduced in parallel with a market economy, these two do not necessarily coexist in peace. Once a racist or ethnically chauvinist party achieves political power, all the fruits of the political and socioeconomic reforms that had been achieved to that point can be instantly obliterated, as evidenced by events in the 1960s and again in the recent tragedies of Somalia and Rwanda. John Hobson [we were unable to confirm the romanized spelling of this name when translating this article from Japanese.] observed that the “missing key” to these problems is the growth and development of civil society.<sup>12</sup>

On the basis of the structural adjustment policies of the International Monetary Fund, essentially macroeconomic policies have been adopted to introduce market principles and promote economic development in African countries. Unfortunately, these have not proven very effective. The background factors are so complex that it is impossible to pinpoint any single cause for this failure, but one reason is the hollowing out of civil society. In other words, the “missing key” is the practical use of the value systems inherent in civil society, as well as the political role that civil society can play. For this reason, the place assigned NGOs must be defined in many different ways and take many different forms. Sometimes, civil society acts as a buffer between the nation-state and society, and sometimes it plays the role of broker. It can function in any number of other roles as well: an agent of change, an anchor in the midst of change, or as midwife.

Efforts to define a new role for NGOs must not be confined to simply requiring them to “grow up,” become good partners with government, or acquire official recognition as “third-sector” organizations. Rather, NGOs have a unique mission and role as the holders of civilian power, which can be considered the starting force behind the new post-cold war world vision of civil society. Broader and deeper NGO participation in planning should therefore provide evidence of a commitment to the construction of a new global system for civil society.<sup>13</sup>

In the process of realizing this new system, a “creative tension” between government and NGOs is unavoidable. This is especially true in countries like Japan, where the “mandarin” tradition (championing the superiority of government officials) is strong. It is impossible to root out the minor-official mentality that seeks to inhibit the development of social (civilian) power while trying to control anything useful by subordinating it.

NGO professionals speak contemptuously of “fake” NGOs that are established by the governments of some developing countries in order to boost the amount of monetary assistance their NGOs receive from other countries. They call them “QUANGOs,” short for “Quasi NGOs.” Once the Japanese bureaucracy, with its habit of treating citizens like children, gets involved in directing or assisting Japanese NGOs, those NGOs will no doubt be viewed as “Rising Sun QUANGOs” by other countries. Japanese sometimes jokingly refer to NGOs that are dependent on ODA as “ODANGOs” (Japanese for “dumplings”), but in fact there is a serious and urgent need for NGOs to establish their financial independence from the government and its bureaucracy.

The Japanese bureaucracy in particular is ill-prepared both psychologically and systemically for the fact that private citizens are beginning to command money, manpower, and information. The situation invites the possibility of bureaucrats putting the squeeze on NGOs that have this kind of mobility. It is also true, however, that the government has established some imaginative programs to back up NGO activities, such as the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications’ Voluntary Deposit for International Aid program. Also, the Africa Education Fund was able to quickly provide medical treatment for Rwandan refugees at the Tanzanian border and garner high praise from the international community precisely because it enjoyed the underpinnings of funding.

The Japanese bureaucracy has another weak point, however. Although it is adept in the alchemy of authority—maintaining the territory of each ministry, apportioning budgets, developing posts for high officials when they retire from government service, etc.—it is unfamiliar with the art of influence. Japanese bureaucrats are totally at sea when it comes to things like shining ideals, personal charisma, social interchange, and skillful networking. Their comprehension of this crucial area is similar to that displayed by Nikita Khrushchev when he was shown an abstract painting. This too has roots in the time-honored Japanese custom of exalting public officials and disparaging ordinary citizens. Today, however, Japanese bureaucrats maintain that same consciousness and attitude in their dealings overseas, which is one reason why the Japanese government has become a target of criticism by NGOs throughout the world, whether the issue is hunting whales, handling plutonium, cutting forests, or building dams. In short,

the Japanese government is insensitive to the importance of the power of influence, as distinct from the power of authority.

Several years ago, I met a Korean university professor in Pusan, Republic of Korea, who had earned his doctorate in law at a Japanese university. He mentioned that all the assistant professors and lecturers belonging to his research department wanted to study overseas in Europe or the United States, but not Japan. "The Japanese government offers invitational programs, and I had hoped my students would go and learn something about Japan," he explained. "But because it's a government program, anyone who participates is labeled a 'Japan-lover' by the mass media, so nobody applies. It would be better if the private sector did more instead of the government."

No doubt things have changed a great deal since then. Nevertheless, I wonder to what extent any private Japanese group—be it an NGO, a foundation, or a think tank—is capable of independently, autonomously, and spontaneously exercising civilian power through the easy and large-hearted activity of ordinary citizens, without governmental intervention.

For Japan, one important characteristic of NGOs, particularly international nongovernmental organizations, is their ability to create a network with counterparts overseas. By supplying information to civil society that is not filtered by the bureaucracy, and by proposing policies and having input in the policy-making process, NGOs permit civil society to improve its ability to formulate opposing evaluations of public policy based on a perspective that differs from bureaucratic evaluations. The goal of governmental deregulation should not be restricted just to opening up Japan's markets. It should also aim at liberating and empowering civil society.

The growth and maturation of civilian power will create a new form of democracy in Japan different from so-called postwar democracy. Ordinary citizens need to speak, participate in planning, and organize in direct, dynamic, and globally oriented ways that cannot be accommodated by such traditional avenues as elections, political parties, and labor unions. The issue of how to create a proper place and framework for these civilian activities represents an opportunity to transcend Japan's current postwar democracy. I believe NGOs should and will become the shining advance guard in this movement toward the reformation of our world.

## Notes

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12. John Hobson, "Civil Society and Political Rebirth in Africa," in John Hobson, Donald Rothschild, and Naomi Chazan, (eds.), *Civil Society and African States*, 1994.)
13. For a treatment of civilian power, global civilian power, and NGOs, see my book *Nihon no taigai kozo—reisengo no bijon o kaku* [Japan in the World: A Vision for the Post-Cold War Era], (Iwanami Shoten, 1993).