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Joint UN-NGO conference in Australia to focus on global health



29 August 2010 – The joint conference of the United Nations department of public information and non-governmental organizations, which gets under way in Australia tomorrow, will this year focus on global health in relation to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), aiming to attract greater participation of civil society from the Asia-Pacific region.

The 63rd annual DPI/NGO Conference, which will take place in the city of Melbourne, has attracted more than 2,200 participants from some 70 countries.

The effort to give priority to non-governmental organizations in the Asia-Pacific region in the annual DPI/NGO conference and increase geographic diversity bore fruit when an unprecedented number of the region's NGOs joined the department on 30 June.

In all, 41 such organizations from the Asia-Pacific region were associated this year, including 32 from Australia, one from Fiji, five from the Philippines, and three from the Pacific Islands.

The new UN policy to offer association to non-governmental organizations in the region where the conference is being held also presents a chance for "solidifying the trend of increasing geographic diversity and greater networking opportunities for NGOs affiliated with the Department of Public Information," said UN Chief of NGO Relations Maria-Luisa Chavez.

Holding the Conference away from United Nations Headquarters “offers a unique opportunity to intensify and strengthen our partnerships with the NGOs and civil society different regions of the world, in this case, the Asia-Pacific region,” she said.

Ms. Chavez noted that this year the Conference has been organized against a backdrop of challenges posed by a 15-hour time difference, geographical distance and even the elections in Australia. Despite this, she declared the list of participants “impressive”.

“This Conference will be different because it is the first time that a UN Conference of this size has been hosted in Australia. We are very excited to meet in this part of the world and to have the strong participation of NGOs from this country,” said Kiyo Akasaka, UN Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information.

Setting the stage for tomorrow's opening of the conference, which will last until 5 September, will be a series of public events in Melbourne under the banner “Making Health Global.”

The programme is directed by Professor Philip Batterham, Convenor of the Australian NGO Focal Group.

“Melburnians already play a role in global health. We give, we volunteer and our medical researchers are tackling the big killers like HIV, malaria, diarrhoea and dirty water,” Mr. Batterham said.

World Vision Australia, the Australian Football League and Melbourne Football Club, among others, hosted an event on today at the Melbourne Cricket Ground to mark the end of the football season before the finals in a game that saw Melbourne versus North Melbourne. The game was dedicated to raising awareness around the issue of child health.

A media event featured statements and a question-and-answer period with the press and Mr. Akasaka, Tim Costello, the Chief Executive Officer of World Vision, Jim Stynes, President of the Melbourne Football Club, and Glenn Archer, former North Melbourne champion.

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