The Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations
2003 Regular Session 5-23 May 2003
The "Paperless Committee": an Electronic Meeting System

The first meeting of the 2003 Regular Session of the Committee on NGOs will be held on 5 May 2003 at 10 a.m. in Conference Room 1 at the United Nations Headquarters. This meeting of the Committee will be a groundbreaking occasion in that it will inaugurate the "Paperless Committee," a fully electronic mode of operation for the NGO Committee and the first initiative of its kind to be introduced to the intergovernmental meeting process. This undertaking represents a response to the proposals for rationalizing the management of conferences and meetings in your most recent report on United Nations reform as they relate to electronic data processing and the flow of documentation as well as facilitating the engagement of civil society and supporting the global commitment to sustainability. It is my honor to invite you to inaugurate this first paperless meeting at the United Nations.

This initiative, spearheaded by the Department's NGO Section, in the Division for ECOSOC Support and Coordination, is part of an ongoing effort to improve the effectiveness of the Committee on NGOs and the efficiency of its working methods. Prompted by the Organization-wide interest in exploring ways to exploit ICT and wireless fidelity applications, the realization of the "Paperless Committee" has been made possible by innovative partnerships with the business community and academia. A loan from the Hewlett Packard Corporation will make available the necessary hardware, in the form of twenty-five laptop computers and wireless connectivity with cable lock available to each member of the Committee and Secretariat meeting support staff. Human resources to set up the programme and work with Committee members as 'guides and trainers' has been provided by the Mumbai Educational Trust of Bombay, India with a two month sponsorship of nine of its top technical students to work with the NGO Section/DESA.

When fully operational, the "Paperless Committee" will enable users to have continuous document updates from the Chair and Secretariat; data transfers making archiving easier; electronic messages, electronic submission of questions simultaneously; note taking and report writing; and electronic vote counting. The use of the laptops during the sessions of the Committee will offset in the long run the cost of some 160 binders containing approximately 40,000 pages of documentation generally given to members of the Committee at each session. Inputs will include all the documentation required for the Committee, even the conference room papers. The outputs will include, electronic circulation of responses from NGO's to questions asked by the Committee, electronic requests from delegates; electronic viewable attendance lists of NGO representatives present in the room; information retrieval with all relevant data about applicant NGOs readily available.

The Secretary-General has stressed the fact that the conferences and meetings convened by the United Nations and the array of documentation it produces "reflect a central and fundamental aspect of how the world's most inclusive multilateral institution conducts its business." We are confident that the technology of the "paperless Committee" offers a potentially revolutionary new way of conducting the intergovernmental business of the global body in the 21st century.