



PRESS RELEASE

International conference to focus on citizens' participation in governance in lead up to World Summit 2005

High-level meeting in Australia will strengthen peoples' engagement in decision-making and encourage citizen-government dialogue for development

New York, 8 August— The first ever *International Conference on Engaging Communities* will be held in Brisbane, hosted by the Government of the State of Queensland, Australia in cooperation with the United Nations. The high-level meeting from 14 to 17 August will attract over 1500 local and international participants including ministers, parliamentarians, senior government officials and members of private and civil society.

The four day long meeting will examine issues of “engaged governance” in democracies—processes that can link government policies and programmes more directly with citizens and communities. Attending the conference will be many well-known speakers including Jose Ramos-Horta, Foreign Minister of Timor Leste and 1996 Nobel Peace Prize Winner, Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi, Minister of Public Administration, South Africa, Mary Robinson, former President of Ireland and former United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Tim Costello, Chief Executive Officer, World Vision, Erna Witoelar, the UN Special Ambassador for Millennium Development Goals for Asia and the Pacific Region and Jomo Kwame Sundaram, UN Assistant-Secretary-General for Economic Development, Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

Setting the scene for the four days, the conference will open with a high-powered debate on the state of global democracy. Facilitated by prominent Australian journalist Maxine Mckew, world renowned leaders including Peter Beattie, Premier of Queensland, will explore challenges faced in democracies and in the processes of democratizing against the backdrop of Kofi Annan, UN Secretary-General's report “In Larger Freedom” released earlier this year.

Coming exactly a month prior to the much anticipated World Summit 2005 at the United Nations headquarters where key decisions on development, security and human rights will be taken, the Queensland conference will promote understanding of sustainable citizens' engagement in ensuring long-term development and good governance. “I hope that the *International Conference on Engaging Communities* will increase the awareness of participants in issues and challenges associated with community and government dialogue and pave the way to recognize this area as a critical element of governance and public administration”, said José Antonio Ocampo, UN Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs.

In many parts of the world, citizens are often far removed from vital government decision-making processes, making administrative policies work in isolation with limited impact on peoples' lives. The challenges of poverty reduction and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)- the eight global objectives agreed by world leaders in 2000- requires tools that are inclusive and based on improved citizen-government dialogue. These challenges call for new working mechanisms that stress partnerships and require innovative solutions to complex problems. The conference provides an important platform for participants to address these challenges; share experiences on viable options; and explore practical approaches and experiences for engaging citizens at all levels of governance.

Six capacity development workshops will be organized by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs in partnership with entities of the UN system and global institutions. Issues pertaining to engaging marginalized groups, indigenous communities, decentralization and partnerships with civil society organizations to achieve the MDGs are likely to be highlighted in the workshops. A workshop on strengthening the rural poor and their organizations is also being organized by the Rome based UN agency, International Fund for Agricultural Development.

Establishment of a Participatory Governance Network and a Centre of Excellence for continuing research and training in the field is expected to be declared on 17 August, the final day of the conference.

For background conference materials, please visit:

<http://www.engagingcommunities2005.com>

http://www.unpan.org/engagingcommunities2005_homepage.asp

For media registration, please contact:

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For more information on the *International Conference on Engaging Communities* or to arrange interviews with United Nations officials, please contact:

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Media may consider the following speakers attending the conference in Brisbane from 14 to 17 August for interviews. If you are interested in conducting interviews, please contact: Mary Christine Ong, UN DESA at 212-963-4758, e-mail ongm@un.org, after 10th August in Brisbane on cell number + 61 (0) 413 386 971 or + 61 (0) 7 3306 7270 or Oisika Chakrabarti, DPI at 212.963.8264, e-mail chakrabarti@un.org

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

Mrs. Mary Robinson

Former President of Ireland & Former United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
Currently the Executive Director of Realizing Rights - The Ethical Global Initiative

Dr. Jose Ramos-Horta

Foreign Minister, Timor Leste and 1996 Nobel Prize Winner

Ms. Mavis McDonald
Permanent Secretary
Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, United Kingdom

Mr. Olivio Dutra
Former Minister of Cities
Brazil

Ms. Georgina Beyer
Member for Wairarapa
New Zealand

Ms Erna Witoelar
Special Ambassador for the Millennium Development Goals for Asia and Pacific
United Nations

Reverend Tim Costello
Chief Executive Officer
World Vision

Professor Stephen Coleman
Cisco Visiting Professor in E-Democracy
University of Oxford

Professor Robert Putnam
Peter and Isabel Malkin Professor of Public Policy
Harvard University

UN INVITED MINISTERS AND SPEAKERS

Ms. Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi
Minister of Public Service and Administration
Government of Republic of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa

Ms. Patricia A. Sto. Tomas
Secretary (Minister), Department of Labour and Employment
Republic of the Philippines

Mr. Thang Van Phuc
Vice Minister, Ministry of Home Affairs
Vietnam

Professor Rehman Sobhan
Chair, Centre for Policy & Dialogue
Bangladesh

SENIOR UN OFFICIALS

Mr. Jomo Kwame Sundaram

Assistant Secretary-General for Economic Development
Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations

Mr. Guido Bertucci

Director, Division for Public Administration and Development Management
Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations

Mr. Adil Khan

Chief, Socio-economic Governance & Management Branch
Division for Public Administration and Development Management
Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations

Mr. Jacinto De Vera

Chief, Policy Analysis & Coordination Unit, Socio-economic Governance & Management
Branch Division for Public Administration and Development Management
Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations

Ms. Elissavet Stamatopoulou

Chief, Secretariat of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
Division for Social Policy and Development, UNDESA