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HEADLINE: Protecting Their Franchise

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BODY:

In the United Nations a few decades ago, the Governments of Member States were virtually the sole players in the international process; non- governmental organizations were seen as mere supporters and mobilizers of public opinion in favour of the goals and values of the UN Charter.

Today, the cultural gap between NGOs and the UN is rapidly and happily disappearing. If the global agenda is to be properly addressed, a true partnership between NGOs and the UN is not an option; it is a necessity.

NGOs are often on the ground before the international community gives the UN a mandate to act. They are essential operators in areas from demining to human rights, from health care to refugees. And they are seen not only as disseminators of public information or providers of services, but also as shapers of public policy.

That is why I am so troubled when the NGO idea is abused: when NGOs are established to procure funding and nothing more, or when NGOs are used as fronts, claiming to be one thing when in fact they are another. The proliferation of NGOs (has) contributed to this problem and feeds suspicion on the part of Governments and others about the whole NGO enterprise. It may be time for civil society and NGOs to consider ways to protect their invaluable franchise.

Kofi Annan UN secretary-general

Whose World is it Anyway? (2000)

GRAPHIC: P Black & White Photo: Kofi Annan

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