NGOs and the United Nations

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**Institutionalization, Professionalization
and Adaptation**

Kerstin Martens

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List of Abbreviations

AAA	Action Aid Alliance
AA UK	Action Aid United Kingdom
AI	Amnesty International
CARE	Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere
CAT	Committee Against Torture
CCPR	Human Rights Committee
CERD	Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
DESA	NGO Section of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs
DHA	Department of Humanitarian Affairs
DPI	Department of Public Information
ECOSOC	Economic and Social Council
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FIDH	Fédération Internationale des Droits de l'Homme
GONGO	Government-organized Non-governmental Organization
HCHR	High Commissioner for Human Rights
HRIC	Human Rights in China
HRW	Human Rights Watch
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
IBRD	International Bank for Reconstruction and Development
ICC	International Criminal Court
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
ICVA	International Council of Voluntary Associations
IFTDH	International Federation Terres des Hommes
IGO	Intergovernmental Organization
ILHR	International League for Human Rights
ILO	International Labour Organization
ISCA	International Save the Children Alliance
MSF	Médecins sans Frontières (Doctors without Borders)
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGLS	Non-Governmental Liaison Service
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
OAS	Organization of American States
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
Oxfam	Oxford Committee for Famine Relief

Oxfam GB	Oxfam Great Britain
SCHR	Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response
UIA	Union of International Associations
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Fund for Population Activities
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Work Agency
WFP	World Food Programme
WGSC	Working Group on the Security Council
WHO	World Health Organization
WTUC	World Trade Union Congress

Preface

There are many people and institutions I wish to thank for their help and support. I have benefited tremendously from my time as a researcher at the European University Institute (EUI) in Florence. Throughout those years, the institute has been an inspiring source; its people, the location and the openness of its academic staff made it a most enjoyable intellectual journey.

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Kerstin Martens
Bremen, June 2005

Foreword

It is no longer disputed that Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) play a prominent role in world politics and that we cannot grasp important developments in the contemporary world system without looking at transnationally operating NGOs. And this even includes the United Nations (UN) system, the quintessential inter-governmental organization on the global level. Most studies so far have tried to successfully demonstrate that ‘NGOs matter’, i.e. that they influence policies, that they contribute to the evolution of international norms, and that they contribute to ensuring compliance with international regimes and regulations. This is also what you mostly learn in ‘NGO 101’.

This book takes a different approach. It opens up a new research venue by asking how the growing NGO involvement in world politics affects these transnational actors themselves. What happens when transnational civil society actors become ‘partners in governance’? Will they bureaucratize and professionalize? Will they start establishing hierarchical structures, i.e., will Michels’ ‘iron law of oligarchy’ kick in? Will they start losing touch with their social base, e.g., social movements? These are important questions for which we do not know the answers yet.

This is where Kerstin Martens’ book comes in. Using a sophisticated research design which builds on the social movement literature as well as on sociological institutionalism, she investigates how NGOs adjust their internal institutional structure and organization in order to be able to affect UN policies and procedures. She also asks under which circumstances NGOs seek to formalize their relationship with the UN through official recognition. But not all NGOs look alike. As a result, Kerstin Martens argues that we can observe very different patterns depending on whether we look at centrally organized NGOs (such as Amnesty International) as opposed to those with a more federative structure (such as, e.g., the Fédération Internationale des Droits de l’Homme). Moreover, it should make a difference whether we deal with advocacy NGOs (such as Human Rights Watch) as compared to more service-oriented groups (such as Oxfam).

The book’s detailed and extremely well-researched empirical case studies show some very interesting findings. Two stick out in my view: First, as to the patterns of activities of NGOs in the UN system, we can observe an enormous broadening. Advocacy NGOs no longer restrict

themselves to initiate policies and to consult with the UN, but they directly participate in the processes of policy-making and implementation. At the same time, service-oriented NGOs no longer restrict themselves to the implementation phase, but their activities now cover the whole range of the policy cycle. Second, internal organizational structures matter a lot concerning the ability of NGOs to effectively influence the United Nations. On average, centralist NGOs with some hierarchical internal structure are best suited to expand their activities with the UN.

This is a terrific book. It is a 'must read' for NGOs and other policy practitioners as well as for academics and graduate students interested in how global governance works in practice and in detail. The book grew out of a dissertation at the European University Institute in Florence where Kerstin Martens received her PhD. I learned a lot from Kerstin's work which constitutes an eye-opener for a new research agenda.

Thomas Risse
Freie Universität Berlin, 1 June 2005