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Civil Society at the 2001 Genoa G8 Summit

Peter I. Hajnal

As the leaders of the Group of Eight (the seven major democratic industrialized countries - Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States - plus Russia) met on the southern Japanese island of Okinawa from 21 to 13 July 2000 for their annual summit, throngs of supporters of local and international civil-society groups were assembling near the site of the meeting. As 27,000 protesters formed a human chain around the huge United States Kadena Air Base, other members of civil society groups engaged in dialogue with representatives of summit-country governments and news media, gave news conferences, and issued press releases and bulletins over the internet.

One year later, the G8 leaders held their summit from 20 to 22 July in the old northern Italian port city of Genoa, well aware of the huge mass protest outside. Demonstrators, estimated at anywhere from 70,000 to 200,000, ranged from groups peacefully opposed to what they saw as a world increasingly controlled by the most powerful states and by large multinational corporations, through those that sought dialogue with G8 governments, to anarchists of all shades. Security concerns had prompted the local hosts to designate a red maximum security zone between 18 and 22 July that was accessible only to local residents and those authorized to be in the immediate area of summit events. Tall wire fences surrounded the red zone, and massive police guards at each gate controlled access. Public demonstrations were not allowed in the larger yellow zone surrounding the central red zone. The port of Genoa was closed to navigation, and the city's airport and main railway stations were also closed. Some groups of protesters challenged the legality of the restricted zones under the Italian constitution, but mainstream groups were willing to confine their demonstrations to officially approved areas. Violent confrontations between a small minority of protesters and Italian security personnel led to the tragic shooting death of Carlo Giuliani, a 23-year-old Italian anarchist (the first death among Western protesters since violent demonstrations around high-level meetings first occurred in Seattle in late 1999, although deaths of demonstrators have been reported in developing countries), some 230 injuries on both sides, 280 arrests, and property damage estimated at up to \$40 million. There were accusations that the police used excessive force, targeted peaceful demonstrators as well as journalists, and perhaps even provoked some of the violence.

How did the civil-society nexus with the G7/G8 change so much in just one year, and what can be learned from the Genoa experience?

Pre-summit events involving non-governmental organizations

When Jubilee 2000, the debt-relief coalition of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), claimed that civil-society campaigners had forced the G8 leaders to retreat to the remote island of Okinawa in 2000, they could be criticized for indulging in hyperbole. A year later, however, when the G8 foreign ministers moved their pre-summit meeting of 7 July from Portofino to Rome, reality caught up with rhetoric: concern about up to 200,000 demonstrators, a small but vocal percentage of whom were prepared to use disruptive or even violent tactics, was undoubtedly the main reason. In Genoa, venues and activities were severely restricted by the protest outside. Out of concern for security, the local hosts of the G8 hired a luxury cruiser, the *Spirit of Europe*, to house all but one of the G8 leaders (George W. Bush stayed at the harbourfront Jolly Hotel Marina), and the security measure described earlier were put in place by the prefecture of Genoa.

Prior to the summit, responsible civil-society groups had made clear their intention to demonstrate and protest peacefully against economic globalization and for more progress on debt relief. They also expressed concern that anarchist and other potentially disruptive or violent groups would jeopardize peaceful, lawful, democratic protest. The Genoa Social Forum (GSF), an umbrella organization of some 700 international, Italian, and local Genoa-based NGOs and civil-society coalitions, included Drop the Debt but also Ya Basta!, an Italian anarchist organization (though an essentially non-violent one). It was unclear from the start how this kind of contradiction could be resolved, especially in light of the announcement by the Social Forum that some of its member groups 'would attempt peacefully to invade the red zone during the planned "day of civil disobedience" on the first day of the summit.'

GSF used its website (www.genoa-g8.org) to publicize its aims; to disseminate news in English, French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, and German; to announce planned events; and to solicit donations. It provided practical information for demonstrators on how to get to Genoa; obtain accommodation and legal and medical assistance; and avoid possessing any object that could be considered an offensive weapon. It also asked doctors, lawyers, interpreters, and journalists to help.

GSF planned three sets of demonstrations in the sanctioned area outside the red zone: a 'Migrants International March' on 19 July; 'Actions of Civil Disobedience' on 20 July; and an international mass demonstration on 21 July.

Drop the Debt, for its part, met Italian national and local government representatives the month before to negotiate plans for peaceful demonstrations. It asked its supporters to participate only in the 21 July march, which would take place outside both red and yellow zones. Concerned about safety, Drop the Debt cautioned its supporters to walk away and comply with the requests of the police and demonstration stewards should they encounter conflict. Its website included, among many other features, an invitation to its supporters to e-mail a 'debt wish' to Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi. It was also reported that Drop the Debt and several other respected aid agencies had 'drawn up contingency plans to avoid the Italian city during the summit on July 20-22 if a repeat of the violence that accompanied the recent European Union meeting in Gothenburg seem[ed] likely.'²

The violence exceeded everyone's expectations and was deplored by G8 leaders and most NGO groups. In a statement issued on 21 July, the leaders recognized and praised the role of peaceful protest and argument, but condemned unequivocally the violence and anarchy of a small minority. And the final communiqué reaffirmed the right of peaceful protesters to have their voices heard and again deplored the violence and vandalism of those who seek to disrupt discussion and dialogue.³

Civil society groups condemned the violence in equally strong terms. Tony Burdon, senior policy advisor at Oxfam, said in a press release of 20 July that 'violent disruption of international meetings doesn't help reach a solution, and it certainly doesn't help the poor. It drowns out the voice of many thousands of peaceful and serious people arguing for AIDS treatment and deeper debt relief.' Adrian Lovett, director of the Drop the Debt campaign, added: 'Peaceful protest works, and it has made a hugely positive impact on recent G8 Summits. The violence we have seen in Genoa achieves nothing. Peaceful campaigners must reflect on how we make sure our concerns are addressed without the risk of hijack by violent extremists.' Médecins sans frontières (MSF) was even more forthright: 'We take a sharp distance from every kind of violence and from those that in one way or another have chosen to manipulate these days in Genoa and created an atmosphere of violence and aggression - be it from the side of the radical demonstrators or the side of the police.'⁴

Predictably, the media focused mainly on the violence. Several G8 leaders expressed their frustration at this disproportionate news coverage to the detriment of reporting on the deliberations of the G7/G8. What was lost in the shuffle was the peaceful but vigorous action and productive networking by civil-society groups.

CIVIL-SOCIETY GOALS AND CAMPAIGNS FOR GENOA

A spectrum of issues ranging from the environment to women's rights was represented in Genoa by a variety of NGO groups. This assessment focuses on just three issues: debt, health, and education.

The dire consequences of unsustainable debt burdens on developing countries continued to be a major theme for the successor organizations of Jubilee 2000: Drop the Debt, Jubilee Plus, and Jubilee Movement International for Economic and Social Justice (JMI). But new linkages emerged as these groups added education and HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases to their long-standing concern about debt. Drop the Debt's 2001 report, *Reality Check: The Need for Deeper Debt Cancellation and the Fight against HIV/AIDS*, documents the transition that has led to the formation of new alliances with organizations fighting against such diseases (for example, MSF) and with those promoting universal education (for example, Oxfam). Civil-society members of the new alliance stress the point that developing countries need deeper debt relief in order to fight the HIV/AIDS pandemic more successfully and to benefit from improved educational opportunities.

Civil society received important support for their work from the special session on HIV/AIDS that the United Nations General Assembly held on 25-27 June 2001. The declaration of the session, entitled 'Global Crisis-Global Action,' emphasizes the importance of partnership between state and non-state actors, including civil society, in the fight against HIV/AIDS.⁵

This interesting convergence of ideas had some parallel developments within the G8. A few weeks before the Genoa Summit, the Italian presidency of the G8 released a document entitled 'Beyond Debt Relief,' which sets forth the elements of an international strategy to stimulate growth and eradicate poverty in the poorest of the developing countries. The strategy rests on three pillars: greater export access for poor countries to the markets in industrial countries; facilitated foreign direct investment and technology transfer to the least developed countries; and greater resources to develop the social sector in the poorest countries to help them to reduce the gap in poverty, health, and education.⁶ The third pillar is particularly relevant to the concerns of civil society. The G8 presidency recognizes that every country needs a healthy and well-educated population if it is to achieve greater social and economic development. The G7 finance ministers revisited these themes in their report, 'Debt Relief and Beyond.' It is important to note, however, that civil-society goals far exceed G8 declarations and commitments.

In health matters, the least developed countries suffer from the greatest infant, child, and maternal mortality, the lowest life expectancy, and the highest rates of HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases. Overcoming these handicaps exceeds the capacity of the poorest countries and demands concerted international action. Building on the Okinawa G8

commitment to fight HIV/AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis, 'Beyond Debt Relief' presents specific proposals that include:

- * intensified co-ordination among states, international governmental organizations, civil society, academic institutions, and industry;
- * greater access to affordable essential medicines;
- * monitoring Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPCs) to ensure that resources freed up by debt relief are used for investments in health and education;
- * developing health indicators to measure progress;
- * linking health to poverty reduction and development strategies;
- * assistance by multilateral development banks; and
- * establishing a dedicated multilateral health facility and a trust fund.

Education is also closely related to poverty reduction. The poorest countries suffer most from weak basic education systems and scarce resources. Specific proposals and objectives set out in 'Beyond Debt Relief' include:

- * support for the principle of 'education for all' - universal primary education by 2015 and gender equality in schools by 2005;
- * reduction of barriers to access to education;
- * greater involvement of civil society in the formulation, implementation, and monitoring of national educational action plans;
- * enhanced teacher training and training in information and communication technologies;
- * enhanced participatory learning methods developed by NGOs, linking literacy with empowerment and local development; and
- * a trust fund to build up additional resources for education.

Here, too, there are signs of convergence of G7/G8 concerns with those of civil society. Oxfam International was the moving force behind the 'Education Now' campaign. The Oxfam Education Report documents the worldwide education crisis and proposes an agenda for reform.⁷ Moreover, Oxfam's agenda has expanded to embrace affordable medicines, conflict resolution, debt cancellation, and market access for developing countries - precisely the issues facing the G7/G8 as it prepared for the Genoa Summit.

GATHERING POINTS FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

Although the Italian government did not set up an NGO centre similar to the one established by the Japanese government in Okinawa in 2000, GSF had several gathering points in the city: an operative centre and press office on the Via Cesare Battisti, a 'convergence point' near the Piazzale Kennedy, a public forum site at the Punta Vagno, and a facility at the Armando Diaz elementary school near the Piazza Tommaseo. The many activities of the GSF included a public forum entitled 'Another World is Possible,' held from 16 to 22 July, an international demonstration of migrants on 19 July, acts of 'peaceful civil disobedience,' and an international mass demonstration planned for 21 July. In the event, the migrant demonstration on 19 July took place more or less as planned, but the demonstrations the next day were marred by anarchist violence (including instances of anarchists turning against peaceful demonstrators) and a similarly violent police response. The death of Giuliani, many injuries, and concern for the safety of supporters led Drop the Debt and other groups, including the World Development Movement (WDM), to stage a vigil alongside the peaceful demonstrations on 21 July.

The 'convergence point' was a staging area for marches and demonstrations and for tents for backpacking demonstrators from out-of-town. It was also the venue for various events including a dramatic exhibition (in a large van dubbed 'Fly Trap') organized by MSF to highlight the nature, consequences, and needed solutions of HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria, and other devastating infectious diseases that affect developing countries with special severity.

Other centres, too, served multiple functions: temporary lodging for demonstrators, internet and telephone access for NGOs, press conferences, and centres for the distribution of campaign literature. During the night of 21 July, one of the centres, the school, was swarmed by Italian police, with no warrant, who smashed computers, confiscated computer disks, and arrested about 90 people including members of the violent anarchist 'Black Bloc' and reportedly beat up protesters and some journalists rather indiscriminately.⁸ Berlusconi promised investigations into the violence and pledged that there would be no cover-up of alleged police brutality. It was subsequently announced that, in addition to the judicial investigations, there would be an Italian parliamentary inquiry. Amnesty International, the well-respected human-rights NGO, welcomed the criminal investigation, but called also for an independent commission of inquiry into various allegations of human-rights violations before and during the summit.⁹

CIVIL SOCIETY DIALOGUE WITH G8 GOVERNMENTS

The tradition of host-government dialogue with civil society continued before and during the Genoa summit. The mayor of Genoa confirmed his intention, which Berlusconi shared, 'to open a dialogue with the movements that intend to demonstrate ... critically but peacefully during the summit.' Media reports added, however, that, according to a statement issued by the Interior Ministry, 'the right of peaceful demonstrations ... would be guaranteed but any form of violence would not be tolerated.' A Reuters report of a meeting on 28 June of the foreign minister, Renato Ruggiero, and the interior minister, Claudio Scajola, with protesters, noted Ruggiero's promise that the Genoa summit would address some of their key concerns and would include representatives from poorer countries, adding that special sessions during the summit would be open to representatives from non-G8 countries. 'Ruggiero called the meeting "an open G8" and said the world's most industrialised nations would discuss hot topics championed by critics of globalisation like reducing debt and fighting against poverty and AIDS.'¹⁰

Several NGO groups had met local authorities in Genoa ahead of the summit to discuss plans for peaceful protest, and consultations with Italian and other G8 government leaders and ministers took place on several occasions during the summit. In a news conference on 20 July, Bono, Bob Geldof, and Lorenzo Jovanotti, pop music stars and strong supporters of the Drop the Debt campaign, talked of a series of meetings they had with the British, German, Canadian, European Union, and Russian leaders, as well as with George W. Bush's security advisor, Condoleezza Rice, but they expressed frustration at the Italian host's refusal to facilitate meetings with leaders from the South. They were encouraged by the Millennium Action Plan for Africa and particularly praised the debt-forgiveness commitments of Canada and Italy. Nonetheless, they added that even some countries whose debt had been cancelled still had to pay their rich creditors. They welcomed the opportunity that such meetings provided to ask the leaders hard questions such as 'Is an African life not worth the same as a European life?' and they took advantage of being able to talk directly to the major shareholders of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) with the power to do something about debt. These widely popular musicians were articulate and powerful symbols of the aspirations and goals of civil society.¹¹

This kind of dialogue is important for the leaders of the G8, as were their outreach meetings with African leaders (the presidents of Algeria, Mali, Nigeria, Senegal, and South Africa) and with the secretary-general of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, and administrative heads of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), World Health Organization (WHO), the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization (WTO). But, if it is to be meaningful, dialogue must not consist of empty words and promises, of which the world has heard too much. A representative of MSF expressed disappointment at what she saw as just that kind of inadequate dialogue at Genoa, in contrast with the more upbeat assessment of Bono, Geldof, and Jovanotti.

Accountability and implementation of G8 promises will be the true test. And civil society will continue to hold the leaders accountable.

NGOS AND CIVIL SOCIETY REFLECTED IN G7/G8 DOCUMENTS

The section of the G7 statement of 20 July concerning a new round of trade negotiations states that 'the WTO should continue to respond to the legitimate expectations of civil society, and ensure that the new Round supports sustainable development.' The final G8 communiqué of 22 July makes several references to NGOs and civil society. It undertakes to 'promote innovative solutions based on a broad partnership with civil society and the private sector.' Under 'A Strategic Approach to Poverty Reduction,' it promises to help (in unspecified ways) developing countries promote active involvement of civil society and NGOs. On launching (with the UN) the global fund to fight HIV/AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis, the communiqué states that local partners, 'including NGOs and international agencies, will be instrumental in the successful operation of the Fund.' In welcoming Russia's proposal to convene a global conference on climate change in 2003, the communiqué emphasizes the participation in the conference of 'governments, business and science as well as representatives of civil society.' Referring to another future conference, the 2001 Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development, it commits the G8 to 'work in partnership with developing countries for an inclusive preparatory process with civil society on a forward looking and substantial agenda with action-oriented results.' On food security, the G8 promises to 'support the crucial role international organizations and NGOs play in relief operations' in sub-Saharan Africa and in Asia, and acknowledges civil society as an important stakeholder in food safety issues in general.¹²

Other official summit documents mention NGOs and civil society. The excellent report submitted to the G8 leaders by the Digital Opportunity Task Force (established by the Okinawa summit with membership from governments, the private sector, and civil society), and the Italian Presidency document, *Beyond Debt Relief*, include a number of such references.¹³ So do the conclusions of the pre-summit meeting of G8 foreign ministers (Rome, 18-19 July), and the report, *Strengthening the International Financial System and the Multilateral Development Banks*, issued by the pre-summit meeting of G7 finance ministers (Rome, 7 July). The latter addresses the reform of multilateral development banks (MDBs) and says that MDBs had already 'held informal consultations with the other MDB shareholders and

NGOs/civil society in order to explain the objectives and the contents of the reform effort.¹⁴ Again, the implementation of these undertakings will need to be monitored carefully.

CIVIL SOCIETY EVALUATION OF THE GENOA SUMMIT

Civil society passed a rather negative verdict on the Genoa summit. Drop the Debt welcomed the global health fund as a good beginning but asserted 'the G8's failure to resolve the debt crisis means that they are giving [with] one hand and taking with the other ... [In] six weeks ... Africa will have paid back in debt repayments every penny of the \$1.5 billion announced today for the health trust fund.' JMI expressed disappointment at 'the failure of the richest nations to once again tackle the global debt crisis that is worsening the impoverishment of over 2 billion people in severely indebted countries.' It acknowledged that the number of countries eligible for debt relief under the HIPC initiative had increased from 9 to 23 between the Okinawa and Genoa summits, but criticized the G7 for congratulating itself on progress when 'most of these countries [were] approaching unsustainable levels of debt again.'¹⁵ JMI disputed the G7 claim of \$53 billion in debt relief, contrasting this with the World Bank's June 2001 figure of \$34 billion.

MSF criticized the global health fund, noting that pledges of \$1.2 billion were 'nowhere near what is required ... [they] are shamefully low. Governments call upon multinationals and the private sector to contribute. Among these are the pharmaceutical companies whose pricing policies are a fundamental part of the problem.' MSF pointed out that the health fund contained 'no clear statement regarding who makes the decisions, on what the funds are to be spent, and no policy to ensure that the fund will be used to purchase medicines at the lowest possible cost.' What was needed was 'a flexible interpretation of the WTO agreements on intellectual property; promotion of the production and use of generic medicines; a tiered pricing system to ensure that medicines in developing countries are affordable; [and] public investment in research and development for neglected diseases.'¹⁶ The initial health fund pledges fell far short of the annual funding of 8 to 10 billion dollars Kofi Annan asked for, and it was unclear how much of the 1.2 billion was new money. And yet, the initiative itself and the fact that this is now of concern both to the UN and to the G8 are important, as Sir Nicholas Bayne observes, with the proviso that 'the main weakness in the G8 position is that their pledges look like one-time contributions, without any assurance of continuity of funding.'¹⁷

Oxfam was equally critical of the summit's record on debt and the health fund but had a slightly more positive reaction to education. 'The G8 did nothing meaningful on debt relief, and announced a global AIDS fund that still needs much more resources and does nothing about the cost of drugs in poor countries. It's unacceptable that these promises remain unmet. But the leaders laid groundwork for an ambitious agenda next year on Africa and education. The G8 agreed to work with poor countries on a detailed plan to get every child in every poor country into school, the kind of initiative that, if fulfilled, would restore a sense of legitimacy and purpose to these summits. Education breaks the cycle of poverty, and is essential in building democracy and fighting AIDS. Last year the G8 promised a global plan for education. In Genoa they said how to accomplish it. By this time next year, we'll know if they will pay their share. The world can't afford another unmet promise.'¹⁸

On energy, a joint statement issued by the WWF (World Wide Fund for Nature, formerly World Wildlife Fund), Greenpeace, and ECA (Export Credit Agencies) Watch condemned the G8 leaders for refusing to adopt the action plan proposed by the Renewable Energy Task Force that the G8 itself set up in Okinawa. The statement added: 'By rejecting its own findings, the G8 are actively denying people in the developing world access to clean reliable energy.'¹⁹

WDM, assessing the final communiqué, commented on the wide gap 'that remains between the leaders and the rest of us.' It gave an almost point-by-point response to the language of the G8, welcoming certain initiatives but awarding the G8 a poor mark overall. Jessica Woodroffe, head of policy at the WDM, said: 'Ultimately these summits must be judged by the benefits they deliver to the world's poor. The result this year has been an anti-poor trade plan, nothing on debt and a feeble [global health] fund.'²⁰

Finally, Drop the Debt expressed significant concern about the shifting priorities of the G8: 'This year the G8's big idea is to fight disease in the poorest countries. But most people are sick to death of G8 initiatives that never quite get delivered. In 1999, it was debt. Last year, it was computers. This year it is health. Next year, we know it will be education. Every unfinished initiative is another blow to the credibility of the G8. They were half way there with debt- this summit is on its way to being a tragic missed opportunity.'²¹ The G8 would do well to reflect on this perception of shifting attention to and away from crucial issues and policy initiatives. Civil society, for its part, could temper its criticism by recognizing that the G7/G8 has been able to deal with several issues simultaneously and has at times achieved results by an iterative process, a case in point being the conclusion of the Uruguay Round of multilateral trade negotiations - it took several years of G7 deliberation to achieve success.²² There may thus be some hope for an increase of G8 commitment, followed by real, if not immediate, release of more substantial funding to combat the scourge of AIDS and other infectious diseases. Of course, civil society must (and undoubtedly will) continue to exert pressure to bring this about.

CONCLUSIONS

Several lessons can be drawn from the interaction of G7/G8 and civil society in Genoa. First, civil society, at its best, gives voice to the plight and aspirations of those marginalized or left behind by globalization, and it fights for the universal extension of the benefits of globalization. It is here to stay and cannot be ignored. It is not sufficient to group all protesters under the 'anti-globalization' umbrella; a more nuanced approach is necessary.

Second, distinguishing among various segments of protesters is not merely an academic or journalistic exercise. Serious civil-society organizations realize that in order to pursue their goals and protect their members and supporters they must isolate and prevent violent groups from sabotaging democratic rights, peaceful demonstrations, and legitimate programmes. Ideally, responsible civil-society groups should find ways to police the demonstrations in which they participate, if they want to prevent destructive elements from infiltrating and hijacking peaceful protest. Such self-examination has already begun.²³

Third, unlike the regular and usually formal arrangements with civil society in the UN system, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and other structured, traditional inter-governmental organizations, civil-society relations with the G7/G8 - a flexible institution by and large unhampered by bureaucratic machinery - are informal. There is increasing mutual recognition of the desirability of dialogue and partnership among these actors, along with the inevitable tensions resulting from differing and sometimes conflicting perceptions, objectives and tactics. How can the G7/G8 bring major, responsible NGOs and civil-society coalitions into some sort of association? Here are some possibilities:

Since the G7/G8 has no secretariat, it has difficulty informing the world public about its goals and concerns. Thus, individual G8 governments and the European Union (EU), as well as academic and other analysts, should perform this sort of public information activity. The G8 Research Group and the G8 Information Centre website (www.g7.utoronto.ca) have been playing a part in this.

The G8-civil society dialogue initiated in Birmingham in 1998 and continued at Cologne (1999), Okinawa (2000), and Genoa (2001) should be institutionalized and made more meaningful.²⁴ The G7/G8 could work with responsible, constructive civil-society groups in partnership rather than confronting those groups as adversaries (although constructive, peaceful confrontation is sometimes necessary). The challenge is to muster the political will and then to find ways to develop such partnerships in a meaningful and mutually beneficial manner. A certain convergence of views and programmes of the G8 and responsible civil society groups evident at the 2001 Genoa summit is cause for some optimism.

The Japanese government initiative of establishing an NGO centre at the 2000 Okinawa summit site is worth repeating and improving, although, in Genoa, NGO groups proved themselves perfectly capable of organizing their own centres and convergence points at or near summit sites. Should that route be taken at future summits, the lesson to be learned from Genoa is that here, too, co-operation rather than confrontation with national and local authorities should be the order of the day.

Fourth, civil society and the G8 (and individual G8 governments) need each other. The injustices of indebtedness of the poorest countries, environmental degradation, lack of access to affordable essential medicines to fight against devastating diseases, educational deficits - these are some of the major concerns of civil society, and it is civil society that plays a crucial role in campaigning for solutions, mobilizing people for support of these causes, and lobbying the most powerful governments and international institutions. But, in the end, the governments of rich countries, powerful institutions such as the G7/G8, the IMF, the World Bank, and the WTO, as well as large pharmaceutical companies, respectively, must implement debt forgiveness, large-scale health and education measures, and access to essential medicines at affordable prices.

And a fifth and final point: in the wake of the turbulent Genoa summit, many questions have been raised about the future of the G8 and the way its business is conducted, as well as about civil society and other protest groups and their methods of operation. For many years, G7/G8 leaders have voiced their preference for smaller, more intimate, and more focused meetings, with fewer officials in attendance and perhaps fewer media personnel around. Although some advances have been made - notably with the 1998 Birmingham summit, at which leaders began to meet without their foreign and finance ministers - much remains to be done. The Financial Times, in a post-Genoa leader, questions whether 'G8 summits should exist and, if so, in what form'; notes that 'summits have worked best when the leaders have had a chance to be separate from their national entourages ... and when there has been a crisis to try to sort out'; and concludes that there 'should have been ... a commitment to hold the next G8 only when there is a burning topic to discuss.'²⁵ Although there were indications in Genoa that at least the Italian prime minister had lost some of his ardour for summits, it is far from clear that the leaders can reach consensus on reducing the frequency of these get-togethers.

Civil society's dialogue with the G8 is set to continue. Canada's prime minister, Jean Chrétien, host of the 2002 summit to be held 26-28 June in Kananaskis, Alberta, has already confirmed his intention to engage in dialogue with NGO groups. Civil society and G8 governments share a responsibility to see that the dialogue is meaningful and productive. Meeting this difficult challenge is in everyone's interest.

Notes and References

Peter I. Hajnal is Research Associate, Munk Centre for International Studies, and Adjunct Professor, Faculty of Information Studies, University of Toronto. A fuller analysis of the evolution and trends of the civil society-G7/G8 nexus will appear in Peter I. Hajnal, ed, *Civil Society in The Information Age: NGOs, Coalitions, Relationships* (Aldershot: Ashgate, forthcoming 2002). I wish to thank Dr Sylvia Ostry, Sir Nicholas Bayne, and Professors John Kirton and Louis Pauly for their encouragement and the opportunity to exchange ideas; Liana Cisneros of Jubilee Plus and Jamie Drummond of Drop the Debt, and Dr James Orbinski and Ellen 't Hoen of Médecins sans frontières for sharing their insights; Diana Juricevic for her research assistance; and Christine Lucyk for her helpful comments.

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