



United Nations Activity Report

The [68th United Nations Civil Society Conference “Building Inclusive and Sustainable Cities and Communities”](#) was held 26-28 August 2019 in Salt Lake City, Utah, United States.

The three-day conference, co-hosted by the United Nations [Department of Global Communications](#), Salt Lake City, and the [NGO Executive Committee](#), featured opening and closing plenary sessions, interactive thematic sessions, NGO-sponsored workshops, exhibits, and a youth hub.

Report Submitted by Aric Shimek, Sigma United Nations Liaison

Peaceful Societies – Recovering from Conflict and Nurturing Peace

From the event website: “Peace is necessary for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and is a specific goal in itself.”

The last decade has been marked by increasing skepticism regarding the viability and effectiveness of multilateral approaches to peacebuilding.

The Peaceful Societies Thematic Session discussed how civil society organizations are integrating objective measures to achieve an inclusive and sustainable culture of peaceful coexistence in their local activities while respecting the integrity of nation states’ sovereign rights.

This session focused on the interface between peace, justice, and strong institutions ([SDG 16](#)) and safe, resilient, sustainable cities and communities ([SDG 11](#)). Speakers included: Samira Harnish, Founder and Executive Director, [Women of the World](#); Lam Tungwar Kueigwong, Founder and Chairman of [Southern Sudan Association](#); Yinka Lamboginny Lawanson, Founder of [Saving Lives Together](#) (SLT); Manav Subodh, Co-founder, [1M1B](#), Global Senior Fellow, UC Berkley; Mirella Dummar Frahi, Civil Society Team Leader, [United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime](#) (UNODC).

This panel discussion began with Mr. Lawanson reminding the audience that “leaving no one behind” means also those in prisons. He said, “As Nelson Mandela told us: ‘No one truly knows a nation until one has been inside its jails. A nation should not be judged by how it treats its highest citizens but its lowest ones.’” He passionately reminded all of us that we must strengthen the judicial and correctional systems in order to create a fair and just society. We must also work to reduce stigmatization associated with those leaving prison. What are we doing to make sure that reintegration is possible? If 80% of the world’s prison population will someday be released, what needs do they have and how can cities plan for this? I found this particularly impactful for Sigma nurses who are often the first and only healthcare providers former prisoners see.

Another speaker from India noted that migration can be controlled through entrepreneurship. Conflict can be avoided, and solutions are being deployed in the United States as well by inner city kids and the formerly incarcerated to give them economic freedom and access to civil society. As we know, poverty and economic disparity are key drivers of conflict. To achieve more peaceful societies, it will require us to level the playing field and create more equitable cities.

Key takeaway from the session: Be a friend and a neighbor to a refugee. Civil society has a great role to play even if they were not part of the social change movement work initially. Do not leave the United Nations convention against corruption alone — civil society must be included in order to make it happen. We can participate through the review mechanisms and also getting our governments to invite us to the table. “Small is the new big.” Think small — if you can create impact at a small scale, it will be scalable. Make sure you leverage technology and business models in the nonprofit world so that the initiative can be long lasting and won’t depend on donor funding. Donate your time, energy, and money. Do not abdicate your role in civil society. Forgive. Leverage your social media. And allow failures to happen; the lessons learned in failure are still worth learning.