

INTRODUCTION TO INCREASING THE INFLUENCE OF NGOs AND CSOs

The fourth mainstream endeavours to find a system of global governance based upon the politics of public interest. A few quotations from William A Galston's "An Old Debate Renewed: The Politics of the Public Interest"¹ will provide a preamble:

Human beings cannot live alone and can only live together by attending to, and to some extent accommodating, the interests of others. A stable and peaceful society, and the means to it, is therefore a part of the public interest. These means will typically include institutions and decision-rules recognised as legitimate, an ensemble of shared beliefs and traits of character, and bonds of truce and confidence among members of the community.

While we cannot determine the public interest through an aggregative calculus, we can certainly say that searching for the public interest requires us to consider the interests of all, not just a part, even if the part constitutes the majority of the community. We are especially inclined to invoke the public interest as a critical norm when we see narrow groups (the "special interests") pursuing their own advantage without concern for the rest of the community. But this opposition between the part and the whole is not a comprehensive template, because it is possible that the actions of even an overwhelming majority can be inconsistent with the public interest.

It does not require us to ignore our individual interests, but it invites us to refine and pursue them in a larger context – a social world in which others have claims different from, but no less weighty than, our own. It seeks to summon what Abraham Lincoln called the "better angels of our nature."²

Galston goes further to suggest that the public interest can only point toward a better governance; it cannot guarantee it. The same holds for seeking the public interest through non-government organisations (NGOs) and community service organisations (CSOs) in their interactions with government institutions. Today there are about 3,400 NGOs that are recognised by the United Nations and they are becoming increasingly specialised in their objectives and in their principal interests. These interact with the increasingly specialised agencies of international organisations. "Overall, NGOs exercise far greater rights at the UN than they do at parliaments within individual countries"³ and that exercise is likely to expand.

¹ Published in *Daedalus*, Vol. 136, No. 4 (Fall 2007), pp. 10-19. Available for purchase at: <http://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/abs/10.1162/daed.2007.136.4.10>.

² The phrase came from "First Inaugural Address", 4 March 1861, in *Great Speeches* by Abraham Lincoln, Dover Thrift Edition, Kindle location 1264.

³ Peter Willett, "The Role of NGOs in Global Governance", *World Politics Review*, 27 September 2011. Available at: <http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/10147/the-role-of-ngos-in-global-governance>.