

THE GLOBAL SOUTH NGO PLATFORM GENERAL ASSEMBLY

SPEECH OF DR. MITHIKA MWENDA, DEPUTY SECRETARY GENERAL – AFRICA REGION;
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Distinguished delegates, esteemed colleagues, partners, and friends,

Allow me to express deep appreciation to the Azerbaijan National NGO Forum and the Agency for State Support to NGOs of Azerbaijan for convening us here in Baku at such a consequential moment in global history, as we inaugurate this all-important platform.

I bring you warm greetings from Africa, and from the Pan African Climate Justice Alliance (PACJA), where we continue to work alongside communities at the frontline of climate change, inequality, and systemic injustice.

This Assembly convenes at a time when the world is experiencing profound geopolitical and geostrategic shifts. We are witnessing the fragmentation of multilateralism, shrinking civic spaces, intensifying conflicts, rising nationalism, and an increasingly unequal global economic order. These realities shape the daily struggles of our people and the operational realities of our institutions.

For many organisations across Africa and the broader Global South, the challenge is no longer simply how to advance development! It is how to sustain hope, solidarity, and democratic civic action amidst compounding crises.

Today, development financing is shrinking while the needs of vulnerable communities continue to grow. Funding cuts affecting humanitarian action, climate adaptation, public health, food systems, and grassroots organising are severely constraining civic action. Yet the burden of responding to multiple crises - climate disasters, debt distress, poverty, displacement, and governance pressures constrained by an unjust global economic system- continues to fall disproportionately on communities and Southern Institutions.

Africa, despite contributing the least to climate change, bears some of its harshest consequences. Our countries spend more servicing debt than investing in healthcare, education, or climate resilience.

Illicit financial flows and unfair tax systems continue to drain billions from our economies annually. Trade imbalances persist, where raw materials leave our continent cheaply while value-added products return at exorbitant prices. Critical minerals essential for the global energy transition are being extracted from our lands, often without equitable benefit-sharing for our people. This context raises stark justice questions that are core to the organising under GSNP.

Colleagues and comrades

We are also approaching a critical moment in the global development agenda. With only four years remaining before 2030, progress on the Sustainable Development Goals remains deeply uneven and alarmingly off track for many countries of the Global South. Poverty, hunger, inequality, climate vulnerability, and unemployment continue to rise in many regions even as global wealth expands elsewhere. The SDG financing gap continues to widen, particularly for Africa and Least Developed Countries.

This reality demands more than rhetorical recommitment. It requires structural transformation.

The recently adopted Pact for the Future is an intergovernmental declaration that offers a strategic opportunity to restore trust in multilateralism and renew global solidarity. Its success depends on Civil society, especially Southern civil society, playing an equal partner role in shaping how the Pact is translated into tangible outcomes for communities.

The implementation of the Pact must therefore prioritise climate justice, debt reform, digital inclusion, intergenerational equity, peacebuilding, and accountable global governance. As such, platforms such as the GSNP have a critical role in ensuring that these commitments do not become yet another archive of unfulfilled promises.

It is also significant that only two days after this Assembly, the World Urban Forum will convene. This comes at a time when cities across the Global South are becoming the primary theatres where inequality, climate vulnerability, migration pressures, youth unemployment, housing deficits, and infrastructure gaps intersect most visibly.

African cities, in particular, are urbanising rapidly amid profound climate stress and limited fiscal space. Yet they also represent extraordinary opportunities for innovation, resilience, green growth, and people-centred transformation.

The conversations in Baku must therefore connect strongly with the global urban agenda. Climate justice is increasingly urban justice. Adaptation, sustainable mobility, housing, water systems, clean energy access, waste management, and resilient infrastructure are no longer isolated sectoral concerns. They are central pillars of sustainable development and human dignity.

Excellencies, colleagues, and comrades,

This is precisely why the Global South NGO Platform matters profoundly at this moment in history.

G SNP is not merely another convening platform. It is emerging as a strategic civic architecture for solidarity, coordination, and influence across the Global South. It brings together diverse voices from Africa, Asia, Latin America, Small Island States, and marginalised communities into one collective platform capable of shaping global discourse from the standpoint of justice and lived realities.

Its strength lies in several unique attributes:

First, it's moral legitimacy. G SNP is rooted in the lived experiences of communities bearing the highest costs of climate change, inequality, debt distress, conflict, and economic exclusion.

Second, its diversity and reach. Few platforms can convene grassroots organisations, faith actors, youth movements, indigenous communities, policy institutions, and development advocates across so many geographies with a shared vision.

Third, its convening power. At a time when multilateralism is strained, G SNP creates an important civic bridge between the Global South and Global North while strengthening South-South cooperation and solidarity.

And fourth, it's strategic timing. The world is actively debating reforms to global finance, climate governance, trade systems, and development architecture. If Southern civil society does not organise coherently now, decisions about our future will continue to be made without us.

This platform, amplifying solidarity, equity, mutual respect, inclusivity, sovereignty, and people-centred development, is an epitome of Baku principles and a strategic frame for collective action.

The platform provides space to advance fair systems that enable climate adaptation, resilience, debt justice, tax justice, just finance systems and sustainable development to thrive at scale.

In this regard, excellences and comrades,

I wish to humbly propose four broad priorities that GSNP can advance to strengthen its effectiveness and influence in driving global reforms.

First, GSNP should strengthen coordinated policy advocacy by building a unified Southern civil society voice on global governance reforms, particularly on development finance, debt restructuring, tax justice, trade equity, urban resilience, and reform of international financial institutions.

Second, GSNP should invest in knowledge sovereignty by creating stronger platforms for Southern research, data, indigenous knowledge systems, and evidence-based policy engagement. We must tell our own stories and define our own development pathways.

Third, GSNP should champion locally led financing mechanisms and push for direct access to climate and development finance for grassroots organizations, cities, and communities, especially women and youth-led movements.

And fourth, importantly, GSNP should help redefine and strengthen the relationship between NGOs and governments across the Global South.

Governments in the South must recognise NGOs as strategic partners in delivering sustainable development, strengthening democratic governance, advancing climate action, and reaching vulnerable communities often left behind by formal systems.

We need a new social compact grounded in constructive engagement, mutual accountability, policy co-creation, and respect for civic space.

A resilient Global South will require strong states, but it will equally require strong, independent, and collaborative civic institutions.

Colleagues,

History reminds us that transformative change has often emerged not from the centres of power, but from organised solidarity among ordinary people determined to shape a different future.

The Global South is not a zone of perpetual vulnerability. It is a reservoir of solutions, resilience, innovation, and possibility.

Let this Assembly in Baku strengthen our resolve to build a more just, inclusive, and sustainable world order.

A world order where climate justice, economic justice, urban justice, and human dignity are not aspirations for a few, but guarantees for all.

I thank you.