

# RAO CONVENTION 2006

## Towards Strengthening State - Civil Society Relations

### Opening Statements by Mrs. Chinnery-Hesse

Chief Advisor to the President, Vice-Chairperson of the National Development Planning Commission (NDPC) and former Deputy Director-General of the International Labour Organization (ILO)

Mrs. Chinnery-Hesse in her opening remarks stated that the theme of the Convention is an acknowledgement of the role civil society plays in the development process. She posed a number of questions: What space exists for RAOs to effectively work and operate to ensure that research outcomes are allowed to influence policy? Mrs. Chinnery-Hesse stated that, the calibre of RAOs is high and they must be given a bigger voice in policy and decision making. She however insisted that RAOs should have the liberty to decide and identify what is relevant, such as themes for research and ways of collaborating with each other. She pointed out that, increasingly, donor institutions are calling for a demonstration of civil society participation in the policy planning process at all levels. There must therefore be niches and centres of excellence that will become focal points of reference, research and policy making. This means that RAOs must be able to improve the knowledge base and share information with the citizens of the country to enable them to participate in a meaningful manner.

She pointed out that civil society activity has gradually shifted from downstream activities, that is, from just providing project based interventions, to more upstream interventions with a policy focus, which has to be recognized. This is evidently a sign of improved good governance, which will lead to enhanced democratic stability, as issues of accountability are now discussed dispassionately.



MRS. MARY CHINNERY HESSE, CHAIRPERSON FOR THE OPENING CEREMONY