We will be using a form of direct democracy based on a relatively informal version of consensus process. Since some participants might not be completely familiar with this kind of thing, a few words of explanation might be helpful.

**WHY DIRECT DEMOCRACY? WHY CONSENSUS?**

Direct democracy is a way for groups of people to come to decisions without having to select leaders or representatives to do it for them; consensus process, an approach to direct democracy which aims to do this in such a way as to ensure that everyone involved has an equal voice, and no one is compelled to do anything they have not agreed to do. Since this summit is no necessarily going to be making that many concrete decisions, no one felt a particularly formal, elaborate style of consensus would be required. Still, the 'spirit of consensus' in which this summit is being conducted does imply a rather different style of discussion and debate than such conferences often involve.

**HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

The tradition of consensus decision-making employed by North American activists seems to go back originally to the Quakers, who in turn say they were inspired by Native American practices. Some civil rights and peace groups of the '50s and '60s used consensus decision-making, but much of the current interest emerged in the '70s, largely, in reaction to some of the more macho leadership styles typical of the '60s New Left. The feminist movement played the crucial role here. More elaborate forms of consensus decision-making, involving affinity groups, spokes councils and the like, first emerged within anti-nuclear groups like the Clamshell Alliance. These forms have proved so spectacularly effective in Seattle and elsewhere, and so liberatory for those who operate within them, that most activists involved in direct action-notably within the globalization movement-see the forms in which their actions are organized as themselves the most promising existing models for what a truly democratic society might be like. Consensus also tends to hold a particular appeal to both anarchists and pacifists, since it is the form of decision-making most consistent with a society not based on compulsion. In fact, there is no known case of a stateless society which used majority voting as a form of decision-making; whether in Asia, Africa, or Amazonia, all developed one or another form of consensus.

**SO HOW DOES IT WORK?**

Well, there are lots of variations. Consensus meetings in the U.S. generally involve one or two "facilitators", whose role is to help participants create an agenda, to keep a "stack" of people wishing to speak (trying to ensure that no one unduly dominates, and no one's voice is tacitly silenced in the process) and then - if this is a decision-making forum - work through specific proposals. Anyone can present a proposal. When one is stated the facilitators first ask for clarifying questions, then concerns - if the concerns seem numerous or serious (and one can sometimes gauge this through the use of non-binding straw polls) the proposal may be withdrawn, or participants may suggest "friendly amendments" to adjust it until a compromise is reached that seems acceptable to everyone. Alternately, someone might propose a creative synthesis or entirely new proposal, which would resolve the outstanding problems. Finally, when one moves to actually finding consensus, everyone has the option of either "standing-aside" – essentially, saying they do not think the proposal is a good idea and (usually) will not themselves participate in a proposed action, but will not prevent others from doing so - or "blocking", which is a way of declaring they believe the
That's someone (on hand. already do much not floor repeat, restate, say for just agree with the you or silent approval of make or likely a If point whether else Especially you ask if have already you Try around of point view. Do that not of argument any amount assume moment comments question make that specific contribution at the human asked condition Try Never Do make A apologies principled, other This point) differences used Those who court leave objections liberal of effect. down proposal is is most proved there majoritarian approach is this most compelling between positions, and representing alternative positions in the worst light, as foolish or misguided, consensus is based on a principle not of polarization but of synthesis. This means (and this is an absolutely crucial point) that:

One is obliged to treat all other participants and their arguments as at the very least honest, principled, and well-meaning. (This is true whatever you might think of them personally!) You must do so even if you otherwise completely disagree with what they are saying.

A few other pointers (with all apologies to those for whom all this is painfully obvious):

Never stand on a soapbox. Do not make grand statements about the nature of the world or the human condition unless you have been specifically asked to do so. Try to ensure your comments make a specific contribution to the practical question at issue at that given moment and do so in the most economical manner possible.

Do not assume that any amount of argument could eventually convince everyone to come around to your point of view. Consensus assumes on inherent diversity of perspectives, and sees that diversity as a value in itself; when one reaches consensus, this means everyone is acquiescing to a specific course of action, not that they all now see things the same way.

Try to keep it brief! Otherwise others won't get the chance to speak.

Especially if you have already spoken more than others, ask yourself if you really need to make a point or whether someone else is likely to. If someone says something wonderful, silent signals of approval ore encouraged - nodding, twinking, thumbs-up, etc. - but please, do not ask for the floor just to repeat, restate, or say how much you agree with what someone else has already said. (On the other hand. if you do mention someone else's idea, acknowledge her!)

That's all. Now let's go and change the world.