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# Between

United Nations Non-Governmental Liaison Service (NGLS)  
Serving the UN system and NGO community since 1975

**Special Issue: Opening of the 63rd Session of the General Assembly**

## UN UPDATE

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

Welcome to this new issue of the *Go Between*.

In our efforts to report on the UN agenda in a timely, coherent and reader-friendly manner, and to make our communication with you as interactive as possible, we have asked two high-level UN officials to share their views on the challenges facing the international community today.

From the expected impacts of the food crisis and the current financial turmoil on the achievement of the MDGs, to issues related to development solidarity and international democratic governance, H.E. Father Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann, the new President of the General Assembly and Dr. Supachai Panitchpakdi, Secretary-General of UNCTAD, share with us their vision and strategies for enhancing the role of civil society in the work of the United Nations system.

Many of the issues they reflect upon constituted the backdrop of a series of high-level meetings, which took place at UN Headquarters in New York throughout the month of September: the High-level Event on Africa's development needs (22 September); the opening of the 63rd session of the General Assembly (23 September) and the High-level Meeting on the MDGs (25 September). These meetings are all covered in this issue of *Go Between*, as well as the high-level panel discussion – co-sponsored by NGLS – that took place in parallel to the Africa meeting and looked at the food crisis and the role of smallholder agriculture in Africa. Civil society organizations provided valuable insights into all these issues, reminded governments of their promises, and also emphasized the importance of civil society's genuine participation and input into decision making processes related to social and economic development.

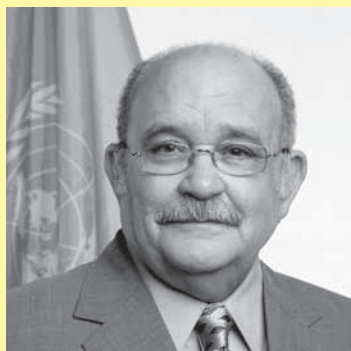
Along with *Go Between 117*, subscribers will find the latest NGLS publication, co-produced with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, entitled *The United Nations Human Rights System: How to Make It Work for You*. Produced in conjunction with the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the publication aims to help inform and guide civil society and others who are seeking to engage with international bodies to ensure the enjoyment of all universally recognized human rights norms and principles. It is available in English and French on the NGLS website ([www.un-ngls.org](http://www.un-ngls.org)).

As always, NGLS values feedback and responses on its publications, which should be directed to [npls@un.org](mailto:npls@un.org) or [npls@unctad.org](mailto:npls@unctad.org).

Elisa Peter, Acting Coordinator, NGLS

A Guest Editorial by H.E. Father Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann, President of the 63rd Session of the General Assembly, appears on page 24 of this special issue of *Go Between*. Entitled "Bringing Democracy to the United Nations," the General Assembly President outlines his concerns and what he aspires to achieve during the 63rd GA session, noting that he has dedicated his presidency to "the poor and oppressed of the world."

See also the article on his task force on the global financial system (page 3).



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Address correspondence to:

The Editor,  
*Go Between*,  
NGLS  
Palais des Nations, CH-1211 Geneva  
10,  
Switzerland  
fax +41-22/917 0432  
e-mail <[npls@unctad.org](mailto:npls@unctad.org)>

NGLS office in New York:  
NGLS  
Room DC1-1106  
United Nations,  
New York NY 10017, USA  
fax +1-212/963 8712  
e-mail <[npls@un.org](mailto:npls@un.org)>

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### Int'l Literacy Day

"One in five adults — some 774 million — is illiterate, and thus lives with no access to the vast global store of written communication. Seventy-five million children are not in school and millions more young people leave school without a level of literacy adequate for productive and active participation in society. These would be devastating numbers at any time, for individuals and societies alike; that they occur in the context of today's information society should drive home the urgency of efforts to promote literacy throughout the world.

"The theme of this year's observance of International Literacy Day, 'Literacy and Health,' is meant to draw more attention to the links between the two. Illiteracy has a direct impact on human health. It prevents people from being able to read the instructions on a medicine bottle. It means that people are less likely to know facts about AIDS, malaria and other infectious diseases. And because two thirds of those who are illiterate are women and girls, who often bear the burden of caring for sick members of their families, it means that they will be less likely to know about prevention and support services, and how to use life-saving medicines and other treatments.

"To increase literacy skills, well-defined policies and increased investment will be essential. Literacy is indispensable for achieving the Millennium Development Goals targeting maternal health and combating HIV and malaria, and for addressing some of the world's most important public health challenges. On this International Literacy Day, let us all — governments, the United Nations family, donors and civil society — translate this commitment into more vigorous action. Literacy for all will benefit us all."

— UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's message for International Literacy Day, observed on 8 September

### DOHA REVIEW CONFERENCE ON FFD

Throughout October and November 2008, government representatives are meeting in "informal consultations" on the draft outcome document (A/CONF.212/CRP.1) of the Follow-up International Conference on Financing for Development to Review the Implementation of the Monterrey Consensus in the run up to the conference, being held in Doha from 29 November through 2 December 2008.

The informal consultations were preceded by a series of review sessions on the six thematic areas of the Monterrey Consensus from February to June 2008. In June 2008, interactive hearings with representatives of civil society and the business sector were held. The GA President issued informal summaries of the review sessions and circulated, on 28 July, the draft outcome document now being negotiated.

In advance of the official conference, a global civil society forum on Financing for Development (FfD), organized with the support of the FfD Secretariat, will be held on 26-27 November 2008 in Doha. On 28 November, the business sector will hold a forum and there will also be a global parliamentary hearing.

Speaking on 9 October, GA President Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann expressed his concern at the beginning of the drafting process for the outcome document. "The global economy is deteriorating rapidly. The outlook for financing for development is very different from what it was just a few months back.

"Today I am gripped by two emotions: uncertainty and urgency. The new reality is that the global economy will get worse before it gets better. It warrants our undivided attention. . . . The only planned, inclusive global gathering of leaders in the immediate future is the Follow-up Review Conference on Financing for Development on 29 November to 2 December 2008 in Doha. Leaders will need to take recent developments into account as they look to the future," he stressed.

Concerns were also expressed at the 8 September launch of the negotiations by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for FfD and South Africa's Minister of Finance, Trevor Manuel, who said, "At Doha we would like to have consensus, but we also need to signal that it is time to change.

We want both consensus and change, and we also want consensus that change is required. But the most important thing is not that we reach consensus. The most important thing is that we see change."

For more information, including dates, past statements and relevant documentation, visit ([www.un.org/esa/ffd](http://www.un.org/esa/ffd)).

See also "The Road to Doha" ([www.un-ngls.org](http://www.un-ngls.org)).

Contact: Daniel Platz, NGO Focal Point, Financing for Development Office/DESA, Two UN Plaza, DC2-2276, New York, NY 10017, USA, telephone +1-212/963 3664, fax +1-212/963 0443, e-mail <[platz@un.org](mailto:platz@un.org)>, website ([www.un.org/esa/ffd](http://www.un.org/esa/ffd)).

### MIDTERM REVIEW OF THE ALMATY POA

A two-day High-Level Midterm Review of the 2003 Almaty Programme of Action (PoA) was held in New York from 2-3 October 2008. The Almaty PoA aims to address the challenges of the world's 31 landlocked developing countries (LLDCs) and the problems caused by their lack of territorial access to the sea and their remoteness and isolation from world markets.

In a declaration adopted at the end of the two-day meeting, participants acknowledged that landlocked and transit countries have registered some progress in carrying out the actions agreed in the 2003 PoA, which set out specific measures to compensate LLDCs for their geographical handicaps with improved market access and trade facilitation. They also expressed concern that the share of global trade of these countries has remained "small." According to United Nations figures, although LLDCs represent about 15% of States, their share of world exports has remained well below 1%.

The declaration also calls for a series of future actions by LLDCs, donors, development partners and institutions to accelerate the implementation of the Almaty Programme, including promoting inter-railway cooperation, facilitating road transit and making full use of available technology to enhance trade and transport.

Donors and multilateral, regional, financial and development institutions were called on to provide substantial technical and financial assistance, notably

in the form of grants or concessionary loans. The declaration urges development partners to put into action the Aid for Trade Initiative, which would help diversify exports by supporting small and medium-sized enterprises.

Participants also welcomed the proposal to set up a global think-tank in Ulaanbaatar (Mongolia) to assist these countries in their efforts to implement the Programme, as well as efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

General Assembly President Miguel D'Escoto stressed that the Assembly would use its authority to ensure that the commitments of donor countries to provide funding and needed technology transfers are honoured. The work outlined in the declaration is "ambitious," he noted. "But inspired by our sense of solidarity with the peoples of these landlocked countries and their neighbours, the way is clear and the possibilities endless."

Further information is available online: ([www.unohrrls.org/en/lldc/673](http://www.unohrrls.org/en/lldc/673)).

### **NGLS/OHCHR: HANDBOOK ON HUMAN RIGHTS**

In the lead-up to the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the United Nations Non-Governmental Liaison Service (NGLS) has produced, in collaboration with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), a handbook entitled, *The United Nations Human Rights System: How to Make it Work for you*.

This handbook – primarily designed for civil society organizations – provides a simple guide for understanding how the UN human rights system works. It gives an overview of the main international treaties and texts, which set forth fundamental human rights. It also explains the way these rights are promoted and protected by the UN. In particular, it describes in a concise manner the functioning of bodies such as the newly established Human Rights Council – with highlights on the Universal Periodic Review, Special Procedures and Complaint Procedure – and the mechanisms derived from specific treaties (e.g. the Committee against Torture and the Committee on the Rights of the Child). In addition, it provides practical information for civil society organizations, national human rights institutions and human rights defenders on how to interact with and contribute to the work of these bodies and mechanisms.

The handbook can be downloaded in English and French from the NGLS website ([www.un-ngls.org](http://www.un-ngls.org)). Hardcopies are available in English and can be ordered from NGLS: [ngls@un.org](mailto:ngls@un.org).

### **GA PRESIDENT: HIGH-LEVEL TASK FORCE**

On 21 October 2008, the President of the General Assembly, Miguel D'Escoto, announced that he was establishing a high-level task force to review the

global financial system, including major bodies such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), in response to the current turmoil that is affecting all countries, large and small. He has appointed Economics Nobel Laureate and Professor, Joseph Stiglitz, to chair the panel, which will also suggest steps to be taken by Member States "to secure a more stable global economic order," according to a news release.

The composition and terms of reference of the task force are to be announced after the holding of the Assembly's special meeting on global financial crisis, scheduled for 30 October at UN Headquarters.

"There is a growing recognition that the current turmoil in the financial system cannot be solved through piecemeal responses at the national and regional levels but requires a coordinated effort at the global level," the release stated. It added that currently, developing countries' voices and interests are not fairly represented in existing global institutions of economic governance.

"The developing world includes many more powerful economies than in 1944, its role in the trading system has grown significantly and it includes prominent creditor as well as debtor nations.

"As such, developing countries have an abiding interest in a democratic rules-based financial system, with effective financing mechanisms and impartial institutions able to deliver timely and tailored policy advice."

Mr. D'Escoto has welcomed the initiatives and declarations of the leading industrial countries, including their intention to hold a summit on the current crisis, as well as the developing countries that are voicing their concern and calling for urgent action. "As the pressure for change builds up, the design of the new architecture must necessarily be inclusive and democratic to be credible and sustainable." He has also pledged to ensure a meaningful outcome at next month's Doha Review Conference on Financing for Development, which he noted comes at a crucial time in the midst of the current turmoil.

### **EXPERT MECHANISM: RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES**

The Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, a mechanism created by the Human Rights Council in December 2007, met for its first session in Geneva from 1–3 October 2008. Composed of five experts, the new mechanism on the rights of indigenous peoples has replaced the Working Group on Indigenous Populations – the first UN body established for the improvement of the living conditions of indigenous peoples. The Mechanism will provide thematic expertise on the rights of indigenous peoples to the Human Rights Council. This expertise will focus mainly on studies and research-based advice and the

### **Database in Creative Products**

In August 2008 the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) launched a new public database in creative products – such as music, audiovisuals, newspapers and electronic publishing.

Currently the site shows global trade flows for 1996–2006. Selected products are listed along with the major exporters and importers in major markets for such creative products as art and crafts, music CDs and video and films. Statistics on some 235 products can be found online (<http://stats.unctad.org/creative>).

UNCTAD says that traditional statistical methods are being updated to reflect accurately the rapidly growing international exchange of digitalized products such as music, films, videos, advertising, news, and all creative content that travel via the Internet and mobile phones.

The *Creative Economy Report 2008* released by UNCTAD and the UN Development Programme (UNDP) in April 2008, shows that global trade in creative goods and services grew by 8.7% annually from 2000–2005, making it one of the most vibrant sectors in world commerce. The value of exports of creative goods reached US\$335.5 billion in 2005, according to figures reported by over 130 countries, while exports of creative services totalled US\$89 billion.

Trade in creative products is dominated by developed countries – they account for about 90% of exports of music and audiovisuals – although the world's poorer nations have achieved rapid growth in the creative sector recently.

Further information is available online: (<http://stats.unctad.org/creative>).

Mechanism may suggest proposals to the Council for its considerations and approval. For example, the Council has requested the expert mechanism to prepare a study on the right of indigenous peoples to education to be concluded in 2009.

Over 300 participants from all regions and different backgrounds met for the first session. Opening the first session, Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights Kyung-wha Kang encouraged the experts to consider the ways in which they would contribute to the promotion and implementation of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

"The Declaration sets out a clear and universally agreed upon framework for the advancement of the rights of indigenous peoples. While the Declaration is non-binding, it nonetheless offers the basis for reconciliation between indigenous peoples and States," she said.

"The provisions of the Declaration provide an agenda for dialogue and practical policy-making. The OHCHR's work is to assist States and indigenous peoples in implementing the Declaration, and the Expert Mechanism has an instrumental role to play in this regard," the Deputy High Commissioner said.

The new mechanism is to coordinate its work with other UN efforts to promote the rights of indigenous peoples, including the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous people and the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

Among others, the Human Rights Council has requested the Expert Mechanism to seek input from relevant stakeholders, and to review and submit recommendations to the anti-racism Review Conference scheduled for April 2009.

Further information is available online: ([www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/indigenous/groups/groups-01.htm](http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/indigenous/groups/groups-01.htm)).

Contact: Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, United Nations, 1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland, telephone +41-22/928 9676 / 9640 / 9164, fax +41-22/928 9066, e-mail <[expertmechanism@ohchr.org](mailto:expertmechanism@ohchr.org)>.

### UNIFEM: PROGRESS OF THE WORLD'S WOMEN 2008/2009

Released by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), *Progress of the World's Women 2008/2009* reveals that much stronger accountability mechanisms for tracking progress on gender equality are needed in order to meet national and international commitments to women's rights. Accountability to women begins with increasing the number of women in decision-making positions, but it cannot stop there, it stresses. The report focuses on five key areas where the need to strengthen accountability to women is urgent: politics and governance, access to

public services, economic opportunities, justice, and finally the distribution of international assistance for development and security. In each of these areas the report details means of building State capacity – or good governance – from a women's rights perspective.

Implementation still has a long way to go in translating commitments to women's rights into changes in women's lives. To date, women are outnumbered four to one in legislatures around the world; over 60% of all unpaid family workers globally are women; women still earn on average 17% less than men, and about one-third of women suffer gender-based violence during their lives. In some parts of the world, one in ten women dies from pregnancy-related causes, even though the means for preventing maternal mortality are cost-effective and well known.

The report puts forth a framework for understanding accountability from a gender perspective and applies this to different contexts in which accountability systems determine women's access to resources and power: politics, public services, labour, consumer and trade markets, justice systems, and international aid and security institutions. It also provides an assessment of each of the Millennium Development Goals from a gender perspective.

Accountability cannot result from demand-side pressures alone. *Progress of the World's Women 2008/2009* demonstrates innovative examples of States and international institutions taking steps to increase the supply side of accountability. This implies gender-responsive changes in the mandates, practices, and cultures of these institutions to ensure that there are incentives and consequences for upholding their commitments to women's rights.

"Good governance needs women, and women need good governance," said Anne Marie Goetz, lead author of the report. "Women have a different perspective on accountability because they often experience accountability failures differently from men. This report argues that good governance needs women's engagement — just as gender equality requires States that are accountable and capable of delivering on promises of women's rights."

*Progress of the World's Women 2008/2009* is available online: ([www.unifem.org/progress/2008/publication.html](http://www.unifem.org/progress/2008/publication.html)).

Contact: UNIFEM, 304 East 45th St, 15th Floor, New York NY 10017, USA, telephone +1-212/906 6400, fax +1-212/906 6705, website ([www.unifem.org](http://www.unifem.org)).

### UNAIDS: 2008 REPORT ON THE GLOBAL AIDS EPIDEMIC

In advance of AIDS 2008, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) released the *2008 Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic* (see Focus Page 20). The report emerges at the halfway mark between the 2001 Declaration of Commitment and

#### Global Handwashing Day

On 15 October, the first-ever Global Handwashing Day took place and sought to reinforce the International Year of Sanitation call for improved hygiene practices. The guiding vision of the Global Handwashing Day is a local and global culture of handwashing with soap. Although people around the world wash their hands with water, too few wash their hands with soap at the critical occasions.

Further information is available online: ([www.globalhandwashingday.org](http://www.globalhandwashingday.org)).

#### Int'l Year of Reconciliation 2009

Recognizing that reconciliation processes are needed in countries and regions of the world that have affected and divided societies as a result of former or present conflicts, the UN General Assembly in November 2006 proclaimed 2009 the International Year of Reconciliation.

An NGO, the Foundation for Subjective Experience and Research (S.E.R.), has developed a Reconciliation Action Plan. The plan aims to support the implementation of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by bringing human communities closer together; by creating a Code of Ethics for conflict resolutions; by strengthening human rights, administration of justice, and equal opportunity; by fostering reciprocity and complementary co-existence; and by enhancing a visionary ideal.

To support their Action Plan, the S.E.R. Foundation invites those interested to play an active part in the International Year of Reconciliation 2009 by undertaking concrete projects and activities around the theme "Unity in Diversity" and portraying reconciliation as a bridge on every level of human endeavors.

Further information is available online: ([www.global-balance.org](http://www.global-balance.org)).

Contact: S.E.R. Foundation Switzerland Office, Oberer Kanalweg 8, CH-2560 Nidau, e-mail: <[info@ser-foundation.ch](mailto:info@ser-foundation.ch)>, website ([www.ser-foundation.ch](http://www.ser-foundation.ch)).

the 2015 target of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to reverse the epidemic by 2015. The launch of the report also occurs only two years before the agreed target date of 2010 for moving as close as possible towards universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care, and support.

The report highlights specific examples of countries which are seeing changes in sexual behaviour followed by declines in the number of new HIV infections. However, the report also shows that despite the declines in new HIV infections, the AIDS epidemic is far from over and that rates of new HIV infections are rising in many countries, including China, Indonesia, Kenya, Mozambique, Papua New Guinea, the Russian Federation, Ukraine, and Vietnam. Increases in new HIV infections are also being seen in some older epidemics and HIV incidence is increasing in countries such as Germany, the United Kingdom and Australia. AIDS also continues to be the leading cause of death in Africa.

From 2001 new HIV infections declined from 3 million to 2.7 million in 2007 [ranges: 2.6 – 3.5 million to 2.2 – 3.2 million]. Although the number of new HIV infections has fallen in several countries the AIDS epidemic is not over in any part of the world. In 2007

an estimated 33.0 million [30.3 – 36.1 million] were living with HIV worldwide, while 2.7 million [2.2 million to 3.2 million] were newly infected, and 2.0 million [1.8 million – 2.3 million] died of AIDS.

The report stresses that AIDS is a long-term issue requiring a response that is grounded in evidence with strong leadership that can sustain commitments over time.

As more people go on treatment and live longer, budgets for HIV will have to increase over the next few decades. Donors will have to provide the majority of the funding required for the AIDS responses in low- and some middle-income countries, even as domestic spending on HIV has increased in these countries.

*2008 Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic* is available online. An interactive e-book is also available: (<http://viewer.zmags.com/showmag.php?mid=ghsqd#/page0>).

Contact: *Kate Thomson, Chief of Civil Society Partnerships Unit, UNAIDS, 20 Avenue Appia, CH-1211 Geneva 27, Switzerland, telephone +41-22/791 4765, fax +41-22/791 4149, e-mail <[thomsonk@unaids.org](mailto:thomsonk@unaids.org)>, website ([www.unaids.org](http://www.unaids.org)).*

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### CHRONIC POVERTY REPORT 2008-09

Four years ago, the Chronic Poverty Research Centre (CPRC) published the *Chronic Poverty Report 2004-05*, the first major international development report to focus on the estimated 320-445 million people who live trapped in chronic poverty and whose children are likely to inherit their poverty.

If the first report examined the dimensions of the problem of chronic poverty, the *Chronic Poverty Report 2008-09* looks at possible solutions and identifies five main traps that underpin chronic poverty – insecurity, limited citizenship, spatial disadvantage, social discrimination and poor work opportunities – and outlines key policy responses to these.

**Insecurity** – the chronically poor are frequently those who live in insecure environments and who have few assets or entitlements to cope with shocks and stresses. Their coping strategies often involve trading long-term goals to improve their lives (e.g. accumulating assets or educating children) for short-term survival.

**Limited citizenship** – chronically poor people have no meaningful political voice and lack effective political representation. The societies they live in and the governments that exercise authority over them do not recognize their most basic needs and rights.

**Spatial disadvantage** – remoteness, certain types of natural resource base, political exclusion and weak economic integration can all contribute to the creation of intra-country spatial poverty traps. Spatial disadvantage also occurs across entire nations (which the CPRC terms “Chronically Deprived Countries”). Many urban locations, despite proximity to possible advantage, are highly disadvantaged, with poor or non-existent public services, high levels of violence and desperate living conditions.

**Social discrimination** – chronically poor people often have social relations – of power, patronage, competition, collaboration and support – that can trap them in exploitative relationships or deny them access to public and private goods and services. These are based on class and caste systems, gender, religious and ethnic identity, age and other factors.

**Poor work opportunities** – where there is limited economic growth, or where growth is concentrated in enclaves, work opportunities are very limited and people can be exploited. Such work allows day-to-day survival but does not permit asset accumulation and children’s education.

The report identifies five key policy responses to these five traps. These policies do not map neatly (on a one-for-one basis) against the chronic poverty traps. Rather, they create an integrated policy set that can attack the multiple and overlapping causes of chronic poverty.

### The Ban Bus

The Ban Bus, an advocacy initiative striving to achieve a ban on cluster bombs by the end of 2008, is working to build strong support for the Oslo Process in countries through East and West Europe, and will conduct a 10,000 km journey from the Balkans to Oslo.

The Ban Bus is planning a variety of events and activities in over 20 countries including public talks, film screenings, and meetings with parliamentarians, government representatives and faith leaders.

On 30 May 2008, 107 participating States at the Dublin Conference on Cluster Munitions agreed to adopt the text of the new Convention on Cluster Munitions. By doing so, they fulfilled their commitment made in the Oslo Declaration (23 February 2007), to: “Conclude by 2008 a legally binding international instrument that prohibits the use and stockpiling of cluster munitions that cause unacceptable harm to civilians and secure adequate provision of care and rehabilitation to survivors and clearance of contaminated areas.”

The new convention will be opened for signature at a Signing Conference in Oslo on 3 December 2008. All States wanting to join the new Convention can attend this ceremony, or sign later at UN headquarters in New York. A series of regional and thematic meetings prior to the Signing Conference will be held.

The new convention prohibits all use, stockpiling, production and transfer of Cluster Munitions. Separate articles in the Convention concern assistance to victims, clearance of contaminated areas and destruction of stockpiles.

The Convention is a result of the Oslo-process, an open and time bound process that included States, civil society, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the United Nations.

More information on the Ban Bus is available online: (<http://thebanbus.org>).

Priority goes to two policy areas — social protection (Chapter 3) and public services for the hard to reach (Chapter 5)—that can spearhead the assault on chronic poverty. Alongside these are anti-discrimination and gender empowerment (Chapter 5), building individual and collective assets (Chapters 3, 4 and 6) and strategic urbanization and migration (Chapters 4 and 5). Working together, these policies reduce chronic poverty directly and create and maintain a just social compact that will underpin long-term efforts to eradicate chronic poverty (Chapter 6). Such social compacts ensure a distribution of public goods and services that contributes to justice and fairness.

The report argues that the development of a “just social compact” between citizens and States must be the focus for poverty eradication. Development actors can nurture such a compact through social protection, public services, effective anti-discrimination action, gender empowerment, economic growth and fiscal policy, and the management of migration and urbanization processes.

*Contact: Chronic Poverty Research Centre (CPRC), Brooks World Poverty Institute, School of Environment and Development, University of Manchester, Humanities Bridgeford Street, Manchester, M13 9PL, UK, telephone +44-161/306 6436, e-mail <cprc@manchester.ac.uk>, website (www.chronicpoverty.org).*

#### **TI: 2008 CORRUPTION PERCEPTIONS INDEX**

With countries such as Somalia and Iraq among those showing the highest levels of perceived corruption, Transparency International's (TI) *2008 Corruption Perceptions Index* (CPI) highlights the fatal link between poverty, failed institutions and graft. But other notable backsliders in the 2008 CPI indicate that the strength of oversight mechanisms is also at risk among the wealthiest. The CPI measures the perceived levels of public-sector corruption in a given country and is a composite index, drawing on different expert and business surveys. The 2008 CPI scores 180 countries (the same number as the 2007 CPI) on a scale from zero (highly corrupt) to ten (highly clean).

Denmark, New Zealand and Sweden share the highest score at 9.3, followed immediately by Singapore at 9.2. Bringing up the rear is Somalia at 1.0, slightly trailing Iraq and Myanmar at 1.3 and Haiti at 1.4. Similarly, statistically significant improvements over the last year can be identified in Albania, Cyprus, Georgia, Mauritius, Nigeria, Oman, Qatar, South Korea, Tonga and Turkey.

Whether in high or low-income countries, the challenge of reigning in corruption requires functioning societal and governmental institutions. Poorer countries are often plagued by corrupt judiciaries and ineffective parliamentary oversight. Wealthy countries, on the other hand, show evidence of insufficient regulation of the private sector, in terms of addressing overseas bribery by their countries, and weak oversight of financial institutions and transactions.

In low-income countries, rampant corruption jeopardizes the global fight against poverty, threatening to derail the Millennium Development

Goals (MDGs). According to TI's *2008 Global Corruption Report*, unchecked levels of corruption would add US\$50 billion — or nearly half of annual global aid outlays — to the cost of achieving the MDG on water and sanitation.

Not only does this call for a redoubling of efforts in low-income countries, where the welfare of significant portions of the population hangs in the balance, it also calls for a more focused and coordinated approach by the global donor community to ensure development assistance is designed to strengthen institutions of governance and oversight in recipient countries, and that aid flows themselves are fortified against abuse and graft, TI notes.

“Stemming corruption requires strong oversight through parliaments, law enforcement, independent media and a vibrant civil society,” Ms. Labelle said. “When these institutions are weak, corruption spirals out of control with horrendous consequences for ordinary people, and for justice and equality in societies more broadly.”

Transparency International emphasizes that a social compact is needed: “Across the globe, stronger institutions of oversight, firm legal frameworks and more vigilant regulation will ensure lower levels of corruption, allowing more meaningful participation for all people in their societies, stronger development outcomes and a better quality of life for marginalized communities.”

*Contact: Transparency International Secretariat, Alt-Moabit 96, 10559 Berlin, Germany, telephone +49-30/3438 20-0, fax +49-30/3470 3912, website (www.transparency.org).*

#### **MAKING MICROFINANCE TRANSPARENT**

A new non-profit organization, “MFTransparency,” was launched by Columbia University professor, Charles Waterfield, in July 2008 to provide transparency in the increasingly complex and now commercialized microfinance sector. Microfinance industry (MFI) organizations have joined together with the Grameen Bank founder and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, Mohammad Yunus, in providing data. They have combined lending power of more than 20 million borrowers.

In an effort to head off a potential crisis in the fast-expanding microfinance industry, its leaders are adopting global truth-in-lending standards and creating a system for comparing loan terms offered by competing lenders. To manage the effort, a new self-monitoring organization, MicroFinance Transparency, is being set up as the industry's policeman. The goal is to prevent companies from taking advantage of poor people with high interest rates and misleading credit offers.

The primary mechanism will be publication of annual interest rates and other central data online: (www.mftransparency.org).

*Contact: MicroFinance Transparency, 325 N West End Avenue, Lancaster PA 17603, USA, telephone +1-717/475 6733, fax +1-866/285 8363, e-mail <finfo@mftransparency.org>, website (www.mftransparency.org).*

#### **New Head of South Centre**

Martin Khor (Malaysia) has been appointed as the new Executive Director of the South Centre. He will take office as of 1 March 2009 at the end of tenure of the current Executive Director, Yash Tandon.

Mr. Khor is the Director of Third World Network, a network of several NGOs in different parts of the developing world.

#### **South Centre Launches INSouth**

INSouth, an intellectual network for the South, embodies an understanding, from a South perspective, of the new and emerging issues in the international arena, and the challenges and opportunities they pose for the South. INSouth aims to serve as a reference point for the South for:

—Analysis of existing development paradigms, imbalances in the current global system, and the limits they pose to the development and policy space of the South.

—Alternative solutions that address the development needs and priorities of the South.

—Promoting new forms of South-South and South-North cooperation.

The Network brings together intellectuals from the global South amongst policymakers, research and academia, the media, the private sector and civil society.

INSouth encourages all colleagues from the global South (those in the South and the North who share and follow the southern perspective) to participate in the activities of the Network. It is currently hosted by South Centre, the Geneva-based intergovernmental policy thinktank of the developing countries.

Further information is available online: (www.insouth.org). Feedback and queries can be sent to <insouth@southcentre.org>.

## HIGH-LEVEL MEETING ON AFRICA: A TIME OF PROMISE AND CHALLENGE

*A High-level Meeting on the theme "Africa's development needs: state of implementation of various commitments, challenges and the way forward," held at UN headquarters on 22 September 2008, brought together world leaders, private sector and NGO/CSO representatives, and all UN entities to spur renewed commitment to Africa's development. It concluded with the adoption of a Political Declaration.*

Held amidst a backdrop of economic uncertainty, climate change, intractable conflict, and rising prices for food and oil, the High-level Meeting (HLM) focused attention on how to address these challenges without reversing gains made over the past few years. As specified by GA resolution 62/242, the HLM was held on the eve of the General Assembly's annual general debate, featured four roundtable discussions co-chaired by African Presidents and Presidents representing the other regions of the world.

Throughout the day, interventions were made by some 28 Heads of State and seven Heads of Government on issues ranging from debt relief for Africa's least developed countries to the effects of climate change on the continent's agricultural sector. The meeting also included the participation of intergovernmental organizations, UN agencies, funds and programmes, the Bretton Woods institutions, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, the World Trade Organization, private sector representatives, regional development banks and civil society organizations.

During the day, 15 seminars and panel discussions, organized by UN agencies and programmes, took place alongside the official high-level roundtable discussions. These events engaged Heads of State, business and non-governmental organizations in many of Africa's priority issues.

The side events also included the Africa Women's Forum, convened by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) in cooperation with UN Member State partners, which brought together gender experts to address the achievements made so far and the challenges that remain for the continent's women. African women represent the largest demographic segment affected by HIV/AIDS, constituting 58% of the 25 million Africans infected by the disease. In addition, while they are the backbone of the informal economy, especially in the agricultural sector, African women lack access to productive resources, including credit, land, and technical and support services.

Key issues discussed at the Forum included the advancement of women and their participation in decision-making processes, reproductive and maternal health, and HIV/AIDS. The Forum urged governments and donors to make the empowerment of women and gender equality priorities to ensure real progress on the continent, particularly towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The HLM took place at the mid-point to the MDG target date of 2015, with growing concerns that Africa will not be able to meet a number of them. A report by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on *Africa's development needs: state of implementation of various commitments, challenges and the way forward (A/63/130)*, submitted to the HLM as the guiding document,

notes that while most of Africa's economies are now growing more rapidly than they did a decade ago, the continent remains "off track" in reaching the MDGs and other development goals. The report is divided into three sections: examining Africa's development challenges within the present global, regional and national environments; reviewing the primary commitments made by African countries and the international community to meet these challenges; and recommendations to positively impact the continent's development.

Acknowledging that tremendous gains are possible if the global community translates its commitments into results, the report outlines some ways in which world players could support the Goals: launching an African green revolution within the framework of the Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Programme; investing in critical infrastructure; strengthening health systems; providing family planning services; and carrying out national water supply and sanitation strategies. Finally, to achieve a conflict-free Africa by 2010, the report concludes that donors should focus on conflict prevention/early warning, post-war reconstruction, peacekeeping and peace enforcement.

Opening the High-level Meeting, General Assembly President Miguel D'Escoto stressed, "Africa's challenges are still enormous. Brave as its nations may be – and we know that they are brave indeed – Africa cannot move ahead on its own.

Mr. D'Escoto noted that African countries' gains in terms of economic growth are real, but they must be strengthened through concrete actions such as more substantial external debt relief and greater access to the global market, as well as efforts to help the continent deal with the current food crisis. Stressing that what the world is witnessing in Africa is no less than "a state of emergency," Mr. D'Escoto urged the international community to "move from promises to concrete action."

"No one is more alarmed than you at the current trends, which indicate that no African country will achieve all the Goals by 2015," Mr. Ban told the Assembly. "But I am convinced that through concerted action by African Governments and their development partners, the MDGs remain achievable in Africa."

He noted that it will cost an estimated US\$72 billion per year in external financing to achieve the Goals by 2015. "This price tag may look daunting. But it is affordable, and falls within existing aid commitments," the Secretary-General said, pointing out that member countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) spent an estimated US\$267 billion last year on agricultural subsidies alone. "In this context, the cost of solving the food crisis, addressing global warming, and pulling millions out of extreme poverty in Africa looks like good value," he stressed.

Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete, President of the United Republic of Tanzania, speaking on behalf of the African Union, underscored that Africa was determined to wrestle itself from its predicament; all it needed was help to complement its efforts. A lack of resources stood in the way, and he was disappointed at the failure of developed nations to follow through on their commitments. Removing debt relief and humanitarian assistance from the equation revealed there had been no real change in aid flows since 2004. A “new impetus” was needed, he urged.

A number of common themes emerged from the different roundtable discussions, including South-South cooperation and inter-cooperation among African nations themselves. The Foreign Minister of Indonesia, Hassan Wirajuda, said his country had long shared best practices in agriculture with African countries, and would continue to do so through agriculture training and apprenticeship programmes.

Others stressed the importance of Africa-led initiatives, such as President Ernest Bai Koroma of Sierra Leone, who stressed that Africa simply needed to learn how to better use its abundant resources. The President of Sao Tome and Principe, Fradique Bandeira Melo de Menezes, suggested that Africa must realize that the North could not be expected to open all markets to Africa; Africa must “fight” for its place in those markets.

Many participants underscored the necessity of updating Africa’s image to a more positive one. Several agreed that a global partnership was essential to achieving the Millennium targets while others noted that developed countries must make good on their commitments and aid cooperation should be more effective. The promotion of good governance, good law and the fight against corruption were also discussed.

Speaking during Roundtable 3, Bekele Geleta, Secretary-General of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), emphasized that Africans wished to live a life of security in which they were treated with fairness and dignity while making a decent living and meeting their basic needs. He said development was not only about raising income levels, but liberating people from fear of the future. Other speakers noted that development efforts should focus on enabling the poor and vulnerable to better meet future risks. To do that, a number of speakers suggested that greater attention should be directed towards youth initiatives, particularly in the area of job creation.

The HLM concluded by adopting a Political Declaration (A/63/L.1) that contains no new pledges, but aims to reinvigorate existing commitments, such as those made in the Millennium Declaration; the 2002 Monterrey Consensus on development financing; and the 2002 Johannesburg Declaration on sustainable development. The leaders confirmed their adherence to the “spirit of cooperation that defines the United Nations system and that is based on a partnership among equals.”

The declaration also acknowledges that eradicating poverty, particularly in Africa, is the “greatest global challenge facing the world today.” While Member States welcomed African Government’s efforts to both mobilize domestic resources and attract private capital to achieve development goals, they expressed concern that the goal of doubling aid to Africa by 2010 would not be reached. They called for fulfilling all official

development assistance (ODA) commitments, including those by developed countries, to increase their share to 0.7% of gross national income by 2015.

Further to the declaration, delegates called for increasing Africa’s share of international trade through regional integration, greater integration into the global economy, and fulfilment of the pledge to create an open and non-discriminatory trading system. Well-functioning national and international financial systems should have the capacity to help support economic growth, they urged.

On climate change, States underlined the need to address both adaptation and mitigation, and to support speedy transfer of technology to ensure low-carbon-intensive economic development. There was also an urgent need for large-scale investments in energy infrastructure, and States were committed to promoting renewable sources of energy. On HIV/AIDS, the Assembly reaffirmed its resolve to provide assistance for prevention, treatment and care, and urged companies to provide access to affordable drugs, including retroviral drugs.

Closing the day’s discussion, the GA President noted that democratization of the United Nations, the Assembly’s key objective, resonated in the outcome document – in its stated “need to enhance the voice and participation of developing countries in policymaking in the areas of trade, money and finance.” The High-level Meeting had raised the profile of the Assembly, the world’s most representative organ, and it was high time for the body to take back the development debate from the Group of Eight and Bretton Woods institutions.

The General Assembly was where Africa constituted the largest group, and rallying around African priorities would go a long way, he continued, adding: “There is a sense of emergency and concrete actions must follow suit.” While development started at home, there was also a clear sense that African efforts be complemented with a change in international economic and trade policies. International aid was not just a matter of the heart, it was a matter of the head – of real and concrete political will. An African renaissance was in the common interest, and after speeches of solemnity came the test of solidarity, he concluded.

*Contact: David Mehdi Hamam, Office of the Special Adviser on Africa, Room S-760 K, United Nations, New York NY 10017, USA, telephone +1-212/963 2645, fax +1-212/963 3892, e-mail <hamamm@un.org>, website (<http://www.un.org/africa/osaa/index.asp>).*

#### **See also:**

General Assembly website: (<http://www.un.org/ga/president/62/ThematicDebates/adnhlm.shtml>).

Schedule of side events and workshops taking place during the HLM: (<http://www.un.org/ga/president/62/ThematicDebates/adn/events.shtml>).

Secretary-General’s report (A/63/130): (<http://www.un.org/ga/president/62/ThematicDebates/adn/63-130.pdf>).

Africa Renewal: (<http://www.un.org/ecosocdev/geninfo/afrec>).

IISD’s Reporting Service’s African Regional Coverage Project information portal: (<http://www.iisd.ca/africa>).

# A RESPONSE TO THE WORLD FOOD CRISIS: SMALLHOLDER AGRICULTURE, FOOD SECURITY AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA

*In parallel with the High-level Meeting on Africa's Development Needs, NGLS – along with FAO, IFAD, WFP, UNDP, UNAIDS, the World Bank, the Republic of Malawi and the Earth Institute at Columbia University – organized a high-level panel discussion entitled: "A Response to the World Food Crisis: Smallholder Agriculture, Food Security and Rural Development in Africa." The meeting focused on agriculture and food security and sought to translate recommendations into action on the ground.*

Keynote speakers included UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, the President of the Republic of Mozambique, Armando Guebuza, FAO Director-General Jacques Diouf, the UN Secretary-General's Special Advisor on the MDGs Jeffrey Sachs, and the President of the Sub-Regional Platform of Peasant Organizations of Central Africa (PROPAC), Elisabeth Atangana.

Mr. Ban pointed out that the steep rise in food prices is putting lives at risk. He lamented the reduction of the share of official development assistance (ODA) going to the agriculture sector, which currently stands at only 4% compared to 20% in 1980. He highlighted the role of the High-Level Task Force on the Food Crisis and its Comprehensive Framework for Action (CFA, see *Go Between* 116), which could be used to mobilize resources and the political will to address high food prices through concrete solutions.

The President of Mozambique noted that the international community has the power to reverse the crisis, especially amongst the estimated 70% of Africans who live in rural areas. He enumerated action plans for increased food production, including the introduction of Green Revolution technologies to enhance seed and fertilizer inputs, the construction of irrigation systems, and providing small farmers with access to credit.

The Director-General of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) stressed the urgency to respond to the food crisis, noting that high prices have increased the number of the hungry by about 75 million. The high prices have also contributed to protests and riots in the urban areas of several countries and impacted small-scale farmers. Dr. Diouf noted that efforts must be made to address the structural constraints facing smallholder farmers and that institutional innovations would be necessary. He also stressed that access to water would be critical to secure a productive sustainable agriculture in Africa since only 7% of all arable land is irrigated.

Mr. Sachs explained that Africa's agricultural output could be more than doubled, but this has not happened, at least in part, because needed and committed external financing has not been provided for the implementation of evidence-based, established interventions.

Ms. Atangana highlighted the vital role of smallholder agriculture, which produces 70% of Africa's food supply and creates 70% of rural jobs, the vast majority of which are worked by women. Several problems facing smallholder farmers were highlighted such as: increasing poverty, lack of access to credit and to land, increase in prices for fertilizer and seeds, and population growth. Efforts of farmers to find solutions to these problems were being offset by the current food crisis. Smallholder farmers could not solve the food crisis single handed, she stressed. The action of States and the international community are essential and the resulting international support must be within direct reach of smallholder farmers. On behalf of a network of 15 million

smallholders, she put forth a number of recommendations. In order to accelerate policy coherence and to improve the competitiveness of the agricultural sector, investments must be made in smallholder farms. The capacity of producers and their organizations to participate in agricultural development programmes must be strengthened, especially by increasing the participation of women. On the international level, PROPAC called for fair market and trade rules between the rich and poor countries, particularly within the World Trade Organization.

Interventions during the discussion were raised from the floor from Member States, international institutions including UN funds and programmes, NGOs and from the private sector. The World Food Programme thanked donors for their response to the food crisis but warned that the crisis is compounding and many are still in the danger zone. Smallholder farmers are not all benefiting from soaring food prices and many cannot afford inputs and have planted only one-third of what they planted one year ago. Furthermore, half of those reached by WFP's urgent food assistance are smallholder farmers who can't raise enough food to feed their families, let alone make enough income to break the poverty cycle.

The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) pointed out that coordination of action is a key component for tackling the current crisis and for ensuring medium and long term agricultural growth and food security. The Comprehensive African Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) provides the right framework for coordination at the regional and global level for effectively implementing comprehensive initiatives to raise food production and promote agricultural and rural development.

In light of the complex vulnerabilities arising out of the combined effect of the recent food crisis, high energy prices and climate change, UNDP called for a global and coordinated response to address the development needs and challenges of poor countries, particularly those in Africa. In addition, UNDP emphasized the need to rethink the international community's standard response to food shortages by supplementing short term interventions with longer term measures

The International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) emphasized reaching the vulnerable people and specifically targeting them in public investments. The need for investing in coordinated and improved information systems for coherent monitoring and in the frameworks for assessing policy analysis and measuring the effectiveness of implementation was also underscored.

The full report of this meeting is available on the NGLS website: ([www.un-nrgs.org/site/IMG/doc/Side\\_Event\\_Summary\\_FINAL.doc](http://www.un-nrgs.org/site/IMG/doc/Side_Event_Summary_FINAL.doc)).

Contact: NGLS New York, Room DC1-1106, UN, New York NY 10017, USA, telephone +1-212/963 3125, fax +1-212/963 8712, e-mail <[nrgs@un.org](mailto:nrgs@un.org)>.

## HIGH-LEVEL EVENT ON THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

*The High-level Event on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), held in New York on 25 September, brought together senior government leaders, UN agencies, chief executive officers, foundations, religious figures, development experts and civil society representatives to bolster efforts at advancing progress towards the eight MDGs. The event ended with a number of new commitments on such issues as education, malaria prevention and reforestation. It also saw strong support for the UN Secretary-General's proposal to host an MDG review summit in 2010.*

Convened jointly by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and General Assembly President Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann, the High-level Event, held alongside the GA's annual general debate, featured three roundtable discussions on Poverty and Hunger; Education and Health; and Environmental Sustainability. The day also included a wide range of side events, including the launch of the Global Malaria Action Plan. Other events focused on gender equity and the MDGs, climate change and development, and water and sanitation for all, to name a few.

In his opening address, Mr. Ban stressed that the current financial crisis threatens the wellbeing of billions of people, particularly the poorest of the poor. "Poor people around the world look to their governments and to the United Nations for help and solidarity. We are accountable to them. Here in this house, everyone counts. So let us live up to our responsibility. I ask you to be bold in your commitments. I ask you to be generous. . . . I hope that we will be able to look back on 2008 as the year when the Millennium Development Goals were put on track," he said.

In his remarks, the GA President stressed the need for a significant increase in international assistance for the world's poorest people, maintaining that present aid amounted to only one tenth of international military budgets. The cost of the war in Iraq alone could have paid for the primary schooling of all those children in the world now deprived of it.

"Faced with today's world food crisis, we must speak out on behalf of our brothers and sisters and say 'This is not right.' It is not just to keep in place agricultural and energy policies that give rise to these kinds of distortions. Now is the time to help the poorest countries to boost their food production capacity."

Unfortunately, food production had been monopolized by a handful of multinational corporations, and hedge funds controlled 60% of the supply of wheat and other basic grains, he stressed. Neoliberal economic policies had affected access to all of life's basic necessities, including food, water and fuel. The current credit crisis presented another threat, and must not be used as a pretext for failing to honour the commitments undertaken in Monterrey and elsewhere, he warned.

Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jaber Al Thani, Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Qatar, said the MDGs could not be achieved in full unless social development was considered an integral part of economic development. He said the follow-up International Conference on Financing for Development to Review the Implementation of the Monterrey Consensus, to be hosted by his country in Doha, would provide a critical opportunity to adopt the required plans of action, not only to get back on track for attainment of the 2015 targets, but also to overcome the deep inequalities that divided nations.

Winston Baldwin Spencer, Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Antigua and Barbuda, speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 developing countries and China (G77/China), pointed out the special status of the eighth MDG because it was the "enabling one." The high-level review should focus on action to implement already-made commitments under that Millennium Goal, and set in motion a process to develop specific benchmarks and targets to measure properly the implementation of

the requisite partnerships. He emphasized that the target for most of the MDGs was not to eradicate or eliminate particular ills, but rather to reduce the extent of suffering and deprivation.

Ela Bhatt, founder of the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) of India, said today's economic environment was out of balance because it did not address simple human needs and fundamental human rights like food, water and shelter for all. It assumed technology would solve all problems. "We are proud of our modern cities, our high-tech hospitals, our shining universities and the bright minds who go on to earn millions, but we are not ashamed of our dying villages and urban slums, where populations go hungry, illiteracy is rampant and curable diseases weaken the people." She proposed placing the MDGs squarely in the centre of national budgets, guaranteeing a living income, providing social protection, ensuring decent work, and building communities.

### Roundtables

The High-level Event featured three roundtable discussions, co-chaired by Heads of State and Government from around the world.

#### Roundtable 1: Poverty and Hunger

Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero of Spain and President Bingu Wa Mutharika of Malawi co-chaired the morning session of Roundtable 1. In the afternoon, President Boni Yayi of Benin took the chair.

Opening the morning session of Roundtable 1, the President of Spain asked participants to consider ways to increase food security around the world and to help farmers counter the forces arising from the rising demand for biofuel. The President of Benin, who opened the afternoon session, asked participants to consider the elements needed for a world partnership for development that would help the donor community and recipient nations to apply development assistance in the most effective way possible.

Nancy Birdsall (Center for Global Development, US) said the war on poverty could only be won by "the leaders and citizens of developing countries themselves." However, in an increasingly interconnected world, the actions of rich countries and their leaders – on trade, migration, greenhouse gas emissions and financial policies in particular – all had an impact on the wider global community. As such, rich countries should be held to account for their actions or inaction and their efforts as part of the global fight against poverty. To date, such accountability had not existed.

Papa Abdoulaye Seck (Director-General of the Africa Rice Centre, Senegal) said Africa had the potential to be one of the greatest agricultural producers in the world: it had sufficient land, tremendous ecological diversity and human resources. However, its resources were not being used to their full potential, due to a dearth in technology. A successful agricultural economy involved the use of well-adapted technology, high quality infrastructure, and a conducive economic environment with an emphasis on environmental preservation.

In the ensuing discussions, which took place over two meetings, many world leaders expressed support for increased production to help countries deal with the current food security crisis. Others pointed out that, even in countries that were on target to reach the MDGs, the situation was difficult. The Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Gambia said that tackling hunger through limited charitable donations, such as donations of food, would only treat the symptoms of poverty and not the root causes. National economic growth was a pre-requisite to poverty reduction, he said, as was the development of social sector policies that enhanced employment opportunities for the poor and ensured minimum safety nets.

### Roundtable 2: Education and Health

Co-chairing the morning session of Roundtable 2 were President Danilo Türk of Slovenia and Prime Minister Ahmad Al-Sabah of Kuwait. Co-chairing the afternoon discussion were Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg of Norway and President Michelle Bachelet of Chile.

Opening the roundtable, President Türk said that the discussion must focus on significant issues, such as how to develop a sustainable health and education system; how to improve the emerging global partnership on health to provide, among other things, essential drugs to the poor. Co-chairing the afternoon discussion, Mr. Stoltenberg urged Member States to step up progress towards meeting the education goals so that, for example, the 75 million children presently out of school could receive primary education by 2015. Special attention was needed for children in conflict States, and nothing was more conducive to development than investing in the education of girls.

Several other high-level speakers participating in the discussion stressed that education and health, which were critical for poverty reduction and sustainable economic development, should be at the core of all development agendas. Many participants from African countries gave progress reports on their efforts to reduce maternal and infant mortality rates, and increase school enrolment. All agreed that increased funding and the political will of donor countries to make good on their pledge to contribute at least 0.7% of gross domestic product (GDP) for development aid were sorely needed.

### Roundtable 3: Environmental Sustainability

In the morning, Roundtable 3 was co-chaired by Han Seung-Soo, Prime Minister of the Republic of Korea, and David Thompson, Prime Minister of Barbados. In the afternoon, the roundtable was co-chaired by Emomali Rahmon, President of Tajikistan, and Tarja Halonen, President of Finland.

Mr. Han said the world community was deep in an ecological deficit, causing more damage than the Earth could regenerate. In the past, the need to protect the environment had often been seen not just as a burden, but as a cost for economic growth. Even today, the first MDG, which addresses poverty reduction, continued to undermine Goal 7, which aimed at ensuring environmental sustainability. To resolve that incompatibility, environmental sustainability should be fully integrated into policy planning, he stressed. A paradigm shift that maximized synergies and minimized trade-offs and engaged the public and private sectors more effectively was needed.

Sheila Dikshit, Chief Minister of Delhi, stressed that the MDGs required close cooperation and detailed policy coordination to improve the lives of the disadvantaged in a growth-oriented yet sustainable manner. In contrast to its past image as a city choking on its own pollution, Delhi had become one of the greenest capital cities in the world due to a host of deliberate policy decisions. While this transformation was by no means complete, it served as an example of what could be done.

Christopher Flavin (President and CEO of the Worldwatch Institute, US) stressed that the environment was the foundation on which the entire

global economy rested. The global community had accumulated massive ecological debts that were now beginning to come due, and increasing levels of consumption meant that a new economic model was required.

Rolph Payet, Special Adviser to the President of the Seychelles, said the world today ran on incentives which all too often promoted accumulation over sharing of wealth. Due to the lack of proper incentives, only moderate progress had been made towards sustainable development. Globalization had brought many benefits, but 90% of the profits from products like fish, diamonds, wood, metal ores, sugar and palm oil were realized outside the source country. That was a recipe for degradation of the environment and perpetual poverty, he stressed.

Throughout the ensuing discussion, which took place during morning and afternoon sessions, many speakers described the specific and alarming ways climate change was already impacting their countries. In light of such widespread changes, collective, urgent action was needed, many speakers said. A number of speakers highlighted the particularly dire situation facing small island developing States (SIDS) and called for a comprehensive rights-based approach to sustainable and just development. Also, the link between those displaced due to environmental changes and poverty should not be underestimated.

### Partnership Events

Throughout the week a wide range of parallel events related to the MDGs were also held, including the launch of the Global Malaria Action Plan, the launch of the "In My Name" campaign and "poverty hearings" with individuals living in poverty. The poverty hearings were organized by the Global Call to Action Against Poverty, with support from the UN Millennium Campaign and NGLS. The hearing saw witnesses from Africa, Asia and Latin America and advocates Mary Robinson, Ela Bhatt, Archbishop Ndugane and Serigne Mansour Sy, speak on three main issues: poverty and hunger, addressing education and environmental sustainability.

Further information is available online: ([www.whiteband.org](http://www.whiteband.org)).

### Closing Plenary

At the end of the High-level Event, Mr. Ban said, "Today we did something special. We brought together a broad coalition for change." The gathering "exceeded our most optimistic expectations," he stated, noting that it generated an estimated US\$16 billion, including some US\$1.6 billion to bolster food security, more than US\$4.5 billion for education and US\$3 billion to combat malaria. The Secretary-General further noted that the day had been a sobering reminder that the "culture of indifference" could not continue. Concerns had been heard about the global financial crisis. "Faced with this and other ongoing crises, we have to work together in the spirit of solidarity and partnership," he urged.

In his closing statement, Mr. d'Escoto strongly supported the Secretary-General's proposal to hold an MDG review summit in 2010, and announced the start of a consultation process to develop a resolution on the objectives and modalities of that meeting.

Great strides had been made over the course of the day, he said, concluding: "We must go forward in partnership, for what we can achieve together is far greater than what any country or organization can accomplish alone. This is the very essence of the United Nations and global solidarity."

Additional reporting on the High-level Event can be found online: ([www.un.org/millenniumgoals/2008highlevel/newsroom.shtml](http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/2008highlevel/newsroom.shtml)) and ([www.iisd.ca/yimb/africa-mdgs](http://www.iisd.ca/yimb/africa-mdgs)).

## UNCTAD CALLS FOR ALTERNATIVE ECONOMIC STRATEGIES AMIDST GLOBAL CRISIS

*The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) held the 55th session of its Trade and Development Board (TDB) amidst a global financial crisis, which UNCTAD Secretary-General Supachai Panitchpakdi described as the "mother of all crises," threatening a global recession which would add to the devastating effects of the global food crisis. These twin crises were the themes of this year's Hearing with civil society and the private sector representatives who called on Member States to take much more fully into account UNCTAD's alternative or "heterodox" analyses and recommendations in their economic policy choices.*

This was the first TDB session since Member States adopted the Accra Accord at UNCTAD XII in Ghana in April this year (see *NGLS Roundup 133*). The Accra Accord reaffirmed UNCTAD's unique role within the UN system for the integrated treatment of trade, finance, investment, technology and sustainable development, with "ahead of the curve" analyses and policy recommendations. Many observers noted that this mandate was successfully put to the test in light of the events that have unfolded since.

The broad consensus emerging from TDB discussions led to a series of recommendations to the High-level Event on Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) held in New York on 25 September 2008 (see Focus Page 10-11), notably the need to integrate MDG efforts into a broader economic development strategy featuring better terms of development partnerships (see Box 1), scaled-up ODA, and a more proactive "enabling State".

### Box 1

The Trade and Development Board examined the economic, social and political situation of least developed countries (LDCs). It evaluated prospects of achieving the MDGs and better strategies to reduce poverty and a more efficient system for the use of aid. Discussions were based on UNCTAD's *Least Developed Countries Report 2008: Growth, Poverty and the Terms of Development Partnership*. The report notes with concern that despite donor commitments to genuine "national ownership"—which is at the heart of the partnership approach to development cooperation—aid-receiving governments are still hindered from tailoring development plans that meet local and national conditions. This "gap between rhetoric and practice" means for example that key macroeconomic targets such as stabilization, privatization, and liberalization of notably the banking and financial sectors remain key conditions to aid. These requirements limit what governments can do and have adverse consequences. Yet greater "ownership" will not only channel aid where it is most effective, the report says, it will also help governments in aid-receiving countries improve their governance capacities — their abilities to plan, analyse, and carry out development projects in ways that stimulate inclusive economic growth and sustainable development.

### **Global financial architecture reform should be UN undertaking**

The evolving financial crisis was the dominant preoccupation during the Board's two-week session. At the close of the meeting, Dr. Supachai noted that UNCTAD had been able to provide very timely and solid policy analysis and advice, which he said had been echoed by world leaders in recent days. "Our *Trade and Development Report* has warned for years that inadequate regulation and weak multilateral monitoring of the global financial system would have dire consequences," he observed (see also Box 2). Many NGOs speaking at the TDB's Hearing with civil society and the private sector (see below) admonished

governments of both developed and developing countries for not having taken UNCTAD's consistent warnings about looming food and financial crises more seriously. There had been precedents, they noted, including UNCTAD's prediction of the 1997-98 East Asian crisis which later spread to Russia and Latin America. Likewise, UNCTAD's recommendations to prevent such crises from being repeated through meaningful reform of the international financial architecture and adequate capital management at national level were not headed in the misguided euphoria of the following years. It was time, many participants insisted, that UNCTAD be given a much stronger role in the multilateral financial governance reform.

**Box 2**

The TDB examined the findings of UNCTAD's *Trade and Development Report 2008: Commodity prices, capital flows and the financing of investment*, which presents the outlook for the world economy and the economic prospects for developing countries in view of the situation in international financial, currency and commodity markets and doubts about the direction of macroeconomic policy in major economies. In particular, the report questions the mainstream theoretical framework of development financing focused notably on high interest rates purported to attract foreign investment and boost domestic savings. This approach, often accompanied by financial reforms involving extended use of market mechanisms, credit deregulation, free interest rates, privatization of banks and the opening to foreign institutions, has not delivered the expected results but led to counter-productive and destabilizing "boom-bust" cycles. The report suggests an alternative approach, based on the works of renowned "heterodox" economists Joseph Schumpeter and John Maynard Keynes, and deriving from the experiences of post-war Western Europe and recent successful "catching-up" experiences in East Asia—where financing of productive investment was based primarily on reinvested profits and the ability of domestic banking systems to create credit. It recommends a series of measures to encourage firms to reinvest their profits in productive capacity and banks to lend to small and medium-sized firms, thus calling for a stronger role for governments in influencing the direction of credit to strategically important sectors and activities. Using this approach, it says, developing countries in many cases can avoid dependence on unreliable foreign capital inflows.

As the global situation further deteriorated in the weeks that followed, the TDB's current President, Debapriya Bhattacharya of Bangladesh, focused his monthly consultation with TDB members on 16 October 2008 on the global financial crisis and to start preparing the ground for UNCTAD's contribution to the UN Financing for Development Conference to be held in Doha, Qatar, on 29 November– 2 December 2008. Dr. Supachai noted that the impact of the crisis was beginning to be felt in the "real sectors" of developing countries. Of particular concern was that the multi-trillion dollar rescue packages for the global banking system—while necessary to avoid its total collapse—risked diverting resources away from pressing development and environmental objectives, notably to enhance productive capacities in poor countries and tackle the problems of climate change. The fate of smaller private banks, especially in developing countries, also had to be considered, as they were not among the large institutions now being effectively nationalized and may not be able to compete for limited funds or receive sufficient help in coping with the current turmoil. More had to be done to keep capital from fleeing from developing countries: the so-called "capital-flow

paradox" had intensified, whereby profits earned in poor nations often ended up overseas rather than helping these countries further their development.

A major preoccupation raised at the meeting was that the "next domino effect" of the crisis could be intensified currency speculation leading to higher gyrations in national currency values with the risk that foreign currency debt holders could go bust as a result. For instance, the recent high volatility observed on the Brazilian Real's exchange value had not been seen in the last 10 years. It was noted that UNCTAD had been warning since 1994 of dangers posed by currency speculation (known as "carry trade"), but this issue had been ignored by the post-World War II institutions set up to deal with this problem—and as recently as the International Monetary and Finance Committee meeting held in Washington DC in the previous days, during which this problem was barely mentioned, one speaker remarked.

In light of recent declarations by the G-8 countries to reform the global financial architecture, many speakers insisted that this could not be a "Bretton Woods II". Such an overhaul of global economic governance had to be undertaken under the aegis of the United Nations, with UNCTAD's cutting edge analysis playing a central part.

***Hearings with civil society and the private sector***

The twin food and financial crises which had already permeated discussions at UNCTAD XII were chosen through an extensive consultative process as the main themes for the Hearings with civil society and the private sector on 17 September, held back-to-back with TDB's High Level Segment. The following is the Chair's Summary of the Hearings presented by a civil society representative at the close of the TDB session.

***Theme 1: The global food crisis: addressing a systemic failure in development strategy***

Participants recognized the food crisis as a humanitarian emergency which threatened to put the Millennium Development Goals further out of reach and agreed that long-term sustainable solutions were needed. The food crisis had been exacerbated recently by increases in the prices of basic commodities and the current global turmoil had given rise to speculation on food commodities. At the same time, the surge in oil prices had led to increases in the costs of commodity production and accelerated the use of alternative energies that relied heavily on commodities.

However, some participants saw the food crisis as a reflection of the failure of development approaches, which was best illustrated by the fact that agricultural productivity in much of Africa was lower than 50 years earlier. Participants identified other causes of the crisis such as deep liberalization of markets, lack of access for small farmers to global markets, and distortions due to subsidies in developed countries. The proportion of total ODA directed towards agriculture and the level of investment in productive capacities in developing countries were very low. Moreover, certain policy choices generated a situation in which some developing countries

produced what they did not consume and consumed what they did not produce. It was pointed out that climate change, with its structural impact on developing countries, was another cause of the crisis.

Resolving the food crisis would require a broad-based partnership and coordinated response. In that connection, the High-level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis set up by the Secretary-General of the United Nations had produced a comprehensive set of recommendations in its July 2008 report, "Comprehensive Framework for Action", which should be implemented. Participants called on donors to finance programmes for agricultural development.

At the national level, the development of productive capacities in agriculture was considered vital to ensure food security in the long term, in order to avoid dependency on food imports. Priority should be given to endogenous policies and to local production in developing countries' efforts to rebuild their agricultural sector. Public policy should pay greater attention to the development of small-scale production as opposed to agri-businesses.

Other suggestions put forward for achieving sustainable development of the agricultural sector included encouraging research and the dissemination of technology and know-how – making use of information and communication technologies, and training courses – increased South-South cooperation and the sharing of experiences. Acknowledging the role of women in the development process, some participants called for them to be given more opportunities to contribute to the reconstruction of the agricultural sector.

Several speakers called on UNCTAD, as an institution that supported developing countries in dealing with trade and development, to give policy advice with a focus on building productive capacities and increasing agricultural productivity, including through Aid for Trade programmes. In addition, there should be closer cooperation between UNCTAD and civil society organizations in addressing the food crisis. Participants also called on UNCTAD to encourage the reduction of agricultural subsidies in developed countries in order to ensure fair global competition.

*Theme 2: The global financial crisis and its impacts on sustainable development*

Several participants stressed that the current financial crisis was the most dramatic one of the past three decades, and its repercussions on the financial sphere and the real economy were global as a result of interdependence. Those repercussions had a major impact on efforts to achieve sustainable development, as the function of the financial sphere was to finance investment, and economic slowdown affected incomes and employment. Moreover, in some cases the public purse was paying for losses made by privately owned financial corporations.

The main drivers of the crisis were considered to be speculation and inadequate regulations, which were allowed under the principles of the free market economy. Regulations could help reduce the social impact of the financial crisis by guaranteeing ethical and human standards. Some rating agencies had also contributed to the crisis, as when a major financial corporation which was relatively well-rated had gone bankrupt. Many participants proposed a multilateral response to the crisis, which should include the establishment of a global body to regulate financial markets in general and the activities of hedge funds in particular. At the national level, there was a need for Governments to take steps to avoid the risks resulting from the speculative nature of the financial market. Regulatory oversight

of that market was necessary to avoid biased interventions in favour of certain companies.

UNCTAD had demonstrated its ahead-of-the-curve thinking and objectivity in its predictions in relation to the recent crises. Participants called for the strategies advocated in the *Trade and Development Report*, policy briefs and other UNCTAD publications to be translated into practical solutions and incorporated in international, regional and national policies. Civil society was encouraged to provide feedback on UNCTAD's work and to identify the areas in which UNCTAD should be engaged. It was suggested that UNCTAD should conduct an analysis of rating agencies and assess their role in developments in the financial markets. Several participants called on UNCTAD to support initiatives to introduce financial governance at the global level. Some participants called on UNCTAD to play an active role in convening an international conference to review the international financial and monetary architecture and global economic governance structures. It was suggested that such a conference would allow UNCTAD to assess the impacts of financial crises on developing countries and propose mitigation strategies.



**Interview with UNCTAD  
Secretary-General Supachai Panitchpakdi  
Follow-up to UNCTAD XII: The Way Forward**

Ahead of UNCTAD's 5th Hearing with Civil Society and the Private Sector taking place on 17 September 2008, NGLS conducted an interview with the UNCTAD Secretary-General, Dr. Supachai Panitchpakdi, to get his perspective and views on a number of issues that would be discussed during the Hearing and how he envisaged the stronger mandate that the Accra Accord has given UNCTAD to increase its engagement with civil society.

*"The global financial crisis and its impact on sustainable development" is one of the key themes of the Hearing and will likely be a main preoccupation during the Board. What is UNCTAD mandated to do in this arena, and how can civil society help out?*

The lingering financial crisis in the United States and its impact on the rest of the world has again highlighted the close link between international finance and broader trade and development issues. This was recognized by UNCTAD's member States at our Accra ministerial conference last April, where they reiterated UNCTAD's strong mandate to identify "specific needs and measures arising from the interdependence between trade, finance, investment, technology and macroeconomic policies from the point of view of its effect on development".

In line with this longstanding mandate, UNCTAD has carried out detailed policy analysis on the causes of the subprime market crisis in the US and its impact on the rest of the world. Already a year ago, UNCTAD highlighted – as is now widely accepted – that the sub-prime market crisis was due largely to a lack of transparency and insufficient regulatory oversight of financial institutions. The crisis then spread, creating an ongoing credit crunch in many other advanced economies. As such, it has become one of the factors precipitating a global slowdown, with significant consequences for development. UNCTAD was also one of the first to draw attention to the potential link between the sub-prime mortgage crisis and the global food crisis, as speculators affected by the fall in equities sought new investment opportunities in commodity markets, thereby exacerbating the rise in food and energy prices. More detailed research on this will be required to determine the precise nature and importance of this link.

More broadly, however, for UNCTAD, the recurrence of financial crises every three or four years is a sign that there is something more fundamentally wrong with the international financial system, and that greater efforts are needed to devise institutional arrangements that ensure greater stability. A new financial system should also be built to avoid prolonged misalignments of exchange rates of the kind that have led to the build-up of the global imbalances now threatening the stability of the global economy. In our view, this will require a more multilateral approach to global finance. Just consider that while there is a comprehensive set of binding rules governing international trade relations, nothing of the kind exists in the area of finance, even though the adverse effects of financial crisis can wipe out gains from trade liberalization in almost an instant.

I think that civil society has an important role to play in advocating a reform of the international financial architecture. Indeed, many NGOs have highlighted the shortcomings of the existing system, and I look forward to their contributions to the debate.

***During UNCTAD XII, Ghanaian President John Kofi Agyekum Kufuor spoke of the new mood of “development solidarity” around the objective of narrowing gaps between countries and attaining the MDGs. Do you agree? What do you think this means?***

There is no doubt in my mind that people are becoming more aware of the urgency of achieving these goals, perhaps in part because of the frightening results of the food, energy and financial crises and the visible signs of climate change. John Donne’s oft-quoted phrase – “No man is an island, entire of itself” – resonates especially strongly in this era of globalization. The development solidarity to which President Kufuor was referring has many strands. It encompasses the growing awareness in developing countries that, with their new role in world economic relations, they can accomplish more together than they would on their own. More generally, it reflects changing values on the part of governments and individuals, including “enlightened self-interest”. And, where civil society is concerned, it offers an unprecedented opportunity to galvanize people, States and international institutions into action to achieve the MDGs.

But in our efforts to reach those goals – and let us remember that as things presently stand, they are unlikely to be met in

many countries by the target year of 2015 – we must ensure that our zeal is not misdirected. Donors justifiably prioritize solutions to the most immediate, and visible, forms of suffering. But as I have said earlier, in the rush to reduce poverty, hunger, disease and illiteracy we must not neglect the “hardware” of development – the roads, ports, institutions and governance that are the preconditions of human welfare. To do this, we will have to rebalance the distribution of international aid so that productive sectors and economic infrastructure receive due prominence.

***The Accra Accord called for UNCTAD to increase its engagement with civil society. How do you see this manifesting itself, particularly in the lead-up to UNCTAD XIII, to be held in Doha in 2012?***

As you know, UNCTAD was one of the first UN agencies to proactively engage civil society and NGOs and seek partnerships. Today, our member States hold regular hearings with civil society during the annual meetings of our Trade and Development Board, and civil society organizations have made important contributions to our ministerial conferences. As I told the Civil Society Forum in Accra, I believe that civil society and the United Nations are natural partners and play important complementary roles. In particular, our intergovernmental work benefits from your grassroots perspective, and your hands-on experience of what works and what does not.

I am therefore very pleased that member States have recognized these complementarities and asked us to increase our engagement with civil society organizations. Indeed, I see this as part of a much broader effort in-house to strengthen our communications and outreach capacities. Also in view of the MDG of creating a “global partnership for development”, we are currently devising a new communications strategy for UNCTAD, which will include ways of increasing our engagement with civil society and the private sector. As part of this process we will be consulting with NGO representatives in the coming months on what they have liked about our past efforts to engage with them, and how we can best improve our dialogue. This will effectively bring civil society into the consultation process, and I look forward to your feedback on our proposals and to your creative suggestions.

#### **UNCTAD Publications**

*Economic Development in Africa 2008:* ([www.unctad.org/en/docs/aldcafrica2008\\_en.pdf](http://www.unctad.org/en/docs/aldcafrica2008_en.pdf)).

*World Investment Report 2008: Transnational Corporations, and the Infrastructure Challenge:* ([www.unctad.org/en/docs/wir2008\\_en.pdf](http://www.unctad.org/en/docs/wir2008_en.pdf)).

*UNCTAD: Trade and Development Report 2008: Commodity prices, capital flows and the financing of investment:* ([www.unctad.org/en/docs/tdr2008\\_en.pdf](http://www.unctad.org/en/docs/tdr2008_en.pdf)).

*Least Developed Countries Report 2008:* ([www.unctad.org/en/docs/ldc2008\\_en.pdf](http://www.unctad.org/en/docs/ldc2008_en.pdf)).

*Contact: Amel Haffouz, Civil Society Liaison/Outreach Officer, Civil Society Outreach (CSO), Communications, Information and Outreach (CIO), Office of the Secretary-General, UNCTAD, Palais des Nations, CH-1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland, telephone +41-22/917 5048, e-mail <[amel.haffouz@unctad.org](mailto:amel.haffouz@unctad.org)>, website ([www.unctad.org](http://www.unctad.org)).*

## CATALYZING MOMENTUM ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND DECENT WORK FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE AND A FAIR GLOBALIZATION

*In September 2008, a series of multi-stakeholder events – held in Oslo, Monrovia and New York – were organized to catalyze political momentum for realizing the human right to decent work, as part of a broader set of activities and campaigns to mark the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in December 2008. These events were the result of an innovative partnership between the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the NGO Realizing Rights: The Ethical Globalization Initiative, working together with the Norwegian and Liberian Governments and with support from NGLS.*

A primary initiator of these activities was Mary Robinson – former President of Ireland and UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, and President of Realizing Rights. Mrs. Robinson described the Declaration as “our living constitution” and referred in particular to Article 23, which spells out the universal human rights prerogatives pertaining to work and social security. Noting that these events aimed to build momentum for Decent Work, she highlighted the need for the Decent Work Agenda to be understood and taken forward by a wide range of actors, including business and civil society, human rights organizations, major development NGOs, campaigning networks, think tanks and foundations.

The three inter-related events brought together representatives of governments, international organizations, civil society, trade unions and businesses, to tackle the challenge of implementing the recent global UN commitment to “full and productive employment and decent work for all” from different angles.

These events took place against the backdrop of a global food crisis and the unwinding of a global financial crisis not seen since the Great Depression. ILO Director-General Juan Somavia noted that even without taking account of these latest developments, the current neoliberal model of globalization was unstable, unfair and unbalanced. The political support for it was waning, and the model had become unsustainable.

Mr. Somavia called for a new policy direction that keeps the notion of “open economies and open societies well at its heart,” but which also involves a new paradigm of quality growth based on expanding opportunities for decent work and more coherent policies, nationally and internationally, among economic, social and environmental objectives.

### ***Oslo: An Employment Impact Assessment of the Doha Trade Agenda Needed***

On 5 September in Oslo, the Norwegian Government in cooperation with the *Financial Times* held an international conference on “Decent Work: A Key to Social Justice for a Fair Globalization” which focused on policy coherence in global governance, especially between the trade and decent work agendas, bringing the heads

of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the ILO around the same table to explore fresh ideas and ways forward.

The Oslo meeting examined how to break the deadlock on the global trade and labour governance nexus. Many participants referred to the ILO’s tripartite Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization, adopted in June 2008, which states that “the violation of fundamental principles and rights at work cannot be invoked or otherwise used as a legitimate comparative advantage and that labour standards should not be used for protectionist trade purposes.” The declaration was seen as a major development in reaching an international consensus on one essential aspect of the trade and labour nexus.

The general thrust of the ensuing discussion suggested that it was not for the WTO to ensure compliance with labour standards and other elements of the Decent Work Agenda, but for a genuine strengthening of the capacity of the ILO and governments to support the development of labour laws, institutions and compliance mechanisms at the national level.

However, another facet of the issue also had to be urgently addressed, namely the impact of trade policies and agreements on employment and decent work. Mr. Somavia noted that a major mistake made by advocates of free trade was to ignore the fact that intensified international competition increases the pace of both job creation and job destruction – and does so in very uneven ways. He proposed that there should be an analysis of both the positive and negative employment impacts of the proposals on the table within the stalled Doha Round of trade negotiations.

WTO Director-General Pascal Lamy agreed that the international system in practice lacked coherence, but the system was still based on a “monopoly of coherence” in the hands of sovereign nation States represented by their governments in international bodies. There were limits to how much the leadership of international organizations could do without the support of their Member States. To begin “breaking this monopoly,” he suggested the establishment of “policy coherence accountability fora,” which would involve the participation of NGOs, trade unions and the private sector to hold nation States or international organizations accountable with respect to their capacity for coherent governance at different levels.

### *Liberia: "Working Out of Poverty" in Africa*

From 8-9 September a high-level forum in Monrovia was held, co-hosted by the Liberian Government, on "Working Out of Poverty: A Decent Work Approach to Development and Growth in Africa," which focused on the conceptual and practical policy challenges of integrating employment and decent work objectives into national development strategies in Africa, especially in post-conflict settings.

Experience from different African countries showed the limits of high growth strategies that generated little employment (extractives, mega projects). A better balance needed to be achieved by directing a much greater share of public and private investment into small-scale job-creating sectors, especially in smallholder agriculture, and reaching out to the overwhelming majority of economic actors who find themselves in the informal economy.

Another objective of the Forum was to see how policy lessons from other African countries could help to inform Liberia's post-conflict reconstruction and development strategy as the country emerges from 14 years of civil conflict. At the opening of the meeting, Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf insisted that "one of the government's most important goals during the PRS [Poverty Reduction Strategy] period is to promote rapid creation of productive employment that will reduce poverty, ensure peace and stability, and enhance the overall well-being of the Liberian population." She noted that the next three years would be critical.

The UN Resident Coordinator in Liberia, Jordan Ryan, stressed the imperative of rapid employment creation, especially in a nation emerging from conflict, where the prospect of getting a job, especially for ex-combatant youth, is a "fundamental alternative to a gun."

Experience from other countries suggested that a major obstacle to employment-friendly macroeconomic policies was the lack of policy space resulting from external conditionalities and the terms imposed by foreign investors. President Johnson Sirleaf would later argue at the high-level forum in New York that these unequal relations could be countered if the government built the capacity to know what were the most appropriate policies for its country, and exercised genuine transparency and accountability to its people – thus having the weight of national legitimacy behind it.

### *New York: A Human Rights Approach to Economic Policy*

The Oslo and Monrovia discussions fed into another high-level forum on 22 September in New York focusing on how a Decent Work approach can help change policy directions in relation to lack of progress in achieving the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which was the central theme of UN General Assembly discussions that week (see Focus Pages 8-11).

The recently appointed High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navanathem Pillay, said the Decent Work Agenda was "at the heart

of human rights." Its promotion could go a long way in helping to realize other human rights, especially economic, social and cultural rights such as the right to food.

Many speakers emphasized the need to align economic policies with social and human rights objectives. José-Antonio Ocampo, former UN Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, said there was a need to mainstream full employment and decent work objectives into economic policy making (including monetary, fiscal and trade policies) and called for genuine dialogue between economists and human rights advocates to help change the way economic policies are formulated and evaluated. He noted that a major step forward was the inclusion of full and productive employment and decent work for all as a new set of targets in the MDG framework, following commitment to make this goal a central national and international policy objective at the 2005 UN World Summit.

### *From the MDGs to a Global "Social Floor"*

A leitmotiv theme throughout this series of events was to shift from a narrow approach to the MDGs to a broader international commitment to establish a "social floor" – defined within the realities of every country's national circumstances, means and priorities. Such a floor would be designed to prevent people from falling into destitution and help them move up the social and economic ladder, but would be more than a safety net: it would combine social investments (for example minimum health care and old age pension coverage, insurance against economic risk and job loss) with market opportunities to expand mobility based on increasingly better jobs.

Mr. Somavia stressed this point in both Oslo and New York. He said that from the perspective of ordinary people it was an aberration to measure progress simply because there was some statistical movement in the number of people that live on US\$1/day to US\$2/day. This was not how people defined their goals and aspirations in life. The measure was rather in terms of their prospect of securing a decent job or livelihood and a future for their children. On this count, he said the MDGs should definitely be called the "Minimum Development Goals." In addition to recent alarming figures on world poverty, the latest food and financial crises only reinforced the notion that we are on the wrong track. "We don't have to wait till 2015 to declare failure. We can begin now to commit to constructing a social floor."

The agenda of the upcoming UN Financing for Development Conference (to be held on 29 November – 2 December 2008 in Doha, Qatar) covering macroeconomic and systemic issues related to development was considered a major opportunity to further the Decent Work Agenda as part of the follow-up to these three initiatives.

A longer, more detailed version of this article is available on the NGLS website: ([www.un-ngls.org/site/IMG/pdf/Human\\_Right\\_to\\_decent\\_work\\_events\\_article\\_\\_final\\_.pdf](http://www.un-ngls.org/site/IMG/pdf/Human_Right_to_decent_work_events_article__final_.pdf)).

*Contact: Hamish Jenkins, Programme Officer, UN Non-Governmental Liaison Service (UN-NGLS), Palais des Nations, CH-1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland, telephone +41-22/917 1447, e-mail <[hamish.jenkins@unctad.org](mailto:hamish.jenkins@unctad.org)>, website ([www.un-ngls.org](http://www.un-ngls.org)).*

# 61ST DPI/NGO CONFERENCE “REAFFIRMING HUMAN RIGHTS: THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION AT 60”

*The 61st DPI/NGO Conference, held for the first time in Paris at the headquarters of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) from 3-5 September 2008, brought together over 1,200 NGO and civil society representatives from 90 countries to hold discussion on human rights in order to generate greater awareness of human rights issues and strengthen commitments to address them among diverse stakeholders worldwide.*

The conference, organized by the UN's Department of Public Information (DPI) in cooperation with associated NGOs, UNESCO, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the Government of France, aimed to highlight effective ways in which civil society, in partnership with other actors, can contribute to the advancement of human rights at the international, regional, national and local levels. It included five roundtables, 42 midday workshops and several breakout sessions.

Normally held in New York, this year's event was held in early September in Paris to mark the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) which was signed in the French capital in 1948. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, in his opening remarks via video conference, noted that since 1948, human rights have been at the core of the UN's work and that civil society has been on the front line. "For six decades, human rights defenders have sacrificed liberty, comfort and even life to ensure that all human beings can enjoy the rights enshrined in the Declaration – irrespective of their race, religion, ethnicity, gender or other status."

UNESCO Director-General Koichiro Matsuura recalled that the conference was being held for the first time in 60 years outside of UN headquarters in New York, and that it was part of the celebrations commemorating the 60th anniversary of the UDHR, which would lead up to a special meeting of the General Assembly on 10 December. He noted that civil society plays an essential role in promoting human rights both to testify and galvanize support. "Without their expertise and in-depth knowledge of the situation and close work and support for the populations affected, UNESCO would be deprived of a key support," he emphasized.

## Roundtables

The 61st session included five roundtables focussing on a range of topics: "Upholding the Universal Declaration of Human Rights," "Overcoming Discrimination to Realize Human Rights and Dignity for All," "Human Rights and Human Security," "Human Rights Education and Learning as a Way of Life," and "Addressing Gross Human Rights Violations: Prevention and Accountability." Further information on the roundtables is available online: ([www.un.org/dpi/ngosection/conference/rotab.shtml](http://www.un.org/dpi/ngosection/conference/rotab.shtml)).

## Midday workshops and other events

Over 40 midday workshops were held during the 61st session. The workshops, an integral part of the DPI NGO conference since its early days, are organized for NGOs by NGOs and allow for peer to peer discussions, an exchange of ideas and experiences and shared approaches to common problems. A wide range of topics were covered, including the human right to food; reconciling human rights with State security; indivisibility of basic rights: how to implement them effectively, to name a few. NGLS participated in one of the midday workshops with colleagues from the UN system (DPI, DESA, UNOG, UNESCO, OHCHR, UNDF) on the UN human rights mechanisms and tools. Further information on the midday workshops is available online: ([www.un.org/dpi/ngosection/conference/workshwed.shtml](http://www.un.org/dpi/ngosection/conference/workshwed.shtml)).

On 3 September, NGLS jointly hosted with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights a breakout session entitled "The United Nations Human Rights System: How to Make it Work for You," during which it launched a joint NGLS/OHCHR publication on the subject. The

publication aims to serve as a guide to civil society actors seeking to engage with the UN human rights system. The breakout session featured the following panelists: Ms. June Ray (OHCHR); Mr. Peter Prove (World Lutheran Federation); Ambassador de Alba, first President of the Human Rights Council; and Ambassador Overfeld, Permanent Representative of Germany to UNESCO. The discussion focused on the opportunities for civil society to use and engage with the human rights mechanisms of the UN system. The event attracted some 150 participants.

## Closing session

In a message read out at the beginning of the closing session, Miguel D'Escoto Brockmann, the President-elect of the 63rd session of the UN General Assembly, said that a particular concern that he intended to have placed on the agenda of the General Assembly at its next session was the right to water, given the increasing privatization of water sources. He counted on the NGOs to reach out to populations on the ground, in particular in Africa, and he looked forward to working with them at the General Assembly next year.

Speaking at the closing session, Kiyo Akasaka, UN Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information, noted that everyone had had the opportunity to learn and understand more about human rights, and how to engage and make better use of the existing human rights mechanisms and instruments. "As we leave Paris, many of the victims of discrimination who were among us will have the opportunity to become more empowered as agents of change within their communities and for us, this will be the greatest mark of success," he added.

Bacre Ndiaye, Director, Human Rights Council and Treaties Division of OHCHR, highlighted the importance of civil society's activities worldwide to advance human rights promotion and protection. He also drew the conference's attention to the increasing number of "NGO laws" that are enacted specifically to curb human rights advocacy. Mr. Ndiaye encouraged civil society to make good use of UN human right mechanisms, including special procedures and the Universal Periodic Review under the Human Rights Council, to defend its prerogatives and rights.

"This is a wonderful outreach opportunity for us to get to know a diverse range of NGOs from all over the world . . . and also to encourage greater use of UN human rights standards and mechanisms for human rights promotion and protection," June Ray, Chief, Civil Society Unit, OHCHR, said.

"There has been a very strong reaffirmation of the UDHR in the conference, particularly in recognition of the indivisibility and interdependence of all human rights. Time and again NGO representatives stated their commitment to doing more with their own communities to make human rights a reality," Ms. Ray added.

The Conference report will be available from DPI before the end of the year. The proposed theme for the 2009 DPI-NGO conference will be on disarmament and will possibly be held in Mexico City.

Contact: Juan Carlos Brandt, DPI NGO Section, Room S-1070L, New York NY 10017, USA, telephone +1-212/963 6842, fax +1-212/963 6914, e-mail <[dpingo@un.org](mailto:dpingo@un.org)>, website ([www.un.org/dpi/ngosection](http://www.un.org/dpi/ngosection)).

## 9TH SESSION OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

*The 9th session of the Human Rights Council was held in Geneva from 8-26 September 2008. At the beginning of the session, the Council heard its first update from the newly appointed High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navanethem Pillay of South Africa, whose four-year term started on 1 September 2008. The Council also considered the human rights situation in Sudan, and follow-up to its special sessions on Beit Hanoun in northern Gaza and on the global food crisis.*

During the session, the Council heard reports from and held interactive dialogues with its Special Procedures on the human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous people; on the adverse effects of the illicit movement and dumping of toxic and dangerous products and wastes on the enjoyment of human rights; on human rights and international solidarity; on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and consequences; and on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

The Council also held an interactive discussion with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict and with mandate holders for the human rights situations in Burundi, Liberia and Somalia. Additionally, it heard a presentation of a report on the defamation of religions by the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance to be delivered by the new mandate holder on behalf of the former Special Rapporteur.

A drawing of lots for the selection of troikas (groups of three rapporteurs) was also conducted for the third, fourth and fifth sessions of the Universal Periodic Review Working Group to take place in December this year, February 2009 and May 2009, respectively. The Council will also determine the order of reviews for the fourth and fifth sessions of the Working Group.

In terms of its new institutional mechanisms, the Council heard a report from its Advisory Committee on its first session, which was held from 4-15 August, and discussed situations brought to its attention under its Complaint Procedure over the course of two closed meetings.

High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay opened the 9th session of the HRC by highlighting the importance of impartiality and adherence to the standard represented by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which is "applied equally to all without political consideration."

"I start from the premise that the credibility of human rights work depends on its commitment to truth, with no tolerance for double standards or selective application," Ms. Pillay said in her first speech to the Council.

"Sustained by the United Nations principles of impartiality, independence and integrity," she said, "I am determined to follow in the footsteps of my predecessors who envisaged and shaped their office as a springboard for the betterment and welfare of all and a place where all are given a fair audience."

Ms. Pillay noted that 2008 contains a number of important human rights milestones – including the 60th anniversaries of the Genocide Convention on 9 December, of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights the following day, and the twin 10th anniversaries of the Declaration on human rights defenders and of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, as well as the 15th anniversary of the Vienna Conference. She urged States not to let "diverging points of view" deter them from taking part in the Durban Review Conference scheduled for April 2009. "I do not believe that 'all or nothing' is the right approach to affirm one's principles or to win an argument," she said. "... The process will certainly benefit from active participation by all States. . . . Should differences be allowed to become pretexts for inaction, the hopes and aspirations of the many victims of intolerance would be dashed perhaps irreparably."

The High Commissioner also noted that "rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly, which are indispensable to the functioning of civil society, have come under sustained attack in all regions of the world."

She encouraged civil society to be constantly vigilant and to make good use of the UN human rights mechanisms to defend its rights and prerogatives.

She emphasized that discrimination on the basis of gender remained a major concern. "Such discrimination makes the Universal Declaration's promise an empty pledge for millions of women and girls," she said. "No effort should be spared to persuade countries to repeal laws and practices that continue to reduce women and girls to second-class citizens despite international standards and despite the specific commitments that have been made to throw out these laws and customs."

Contact: Laura Dolci-Kanaan, NGO Liaison Officer, OHCHR Civil Society Unit, Palais Wilson, Room 2-080, CH-1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland, telephone +41-22/917 9656, fax +41-22/917 9012, e-mail [ldolci-kanaan@ohchr.org](mailto:ldolci-kanaan@ohchr.org), website ([www.ohchr.org](http://www.ohchr.org)).

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## MEXICO CITY: AIDS 2008 UNIVERSAL ACTION NOW!

*The XVII International AIDS Conference (AIDS 2008) was held in Mexico City (Mexico) from 3-8 August 2008, bringing together an estimated 22,000 people engaged in the fight against AIDS. Leaders, policymakers, academics, scientists and activists from around the world sought to assess progress in the AIDS response and to identify future priorities in scaling up global efforts to stop the HIV epidemic.*

In his opening remarks, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said that most countries still have a long way to go to meet the goal they set two years ago at the General Assembly – the goal to scale up towards universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support by 2010. As a result, he noted that they will have great difficulty in reaching the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of halting and reversing the spread of AIDS by 2015 and that this would have repercussions on many fronts.

The Executive Director of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) Peter Piot noted that in order to sustain a robust AIDS response over the longer term, the coalition of those working for a set of common goals must be enlarged. "This means reaching out far more than before to those who are strengthening health systems and are in charge of drug control. It means building stronger linkages with those working on tuberculosis and sexual and reproductive, and maternal and child health. It means involving far more young leaders." He stressed that broadening the coalition "must not come at the expense of the non-negotiables of working across sectors, involving civil society and of people living with HIV, grounding our action in science, rooting all we do in human rights, and focusing on results for people."

Working under the theme Universal Action Now!, AIDS 2008 called for a renewed commitment from the international community to strengthen the scale up of HIV prevention, treatment, care and support programmes worldwide, with the aim to provide universal access to these services by 2010.

Preventing the transmission of HIV also received significant focus during the conference and HIV prevention successes and failures to date were analyzed, leading to a greater understanding that "combination prevention" is as necessary as "combination treatment" when it comes to stopping the HIV epidemic – because for every two people that began antiretroviral treatment last year, five became newly infected, participants stressed.

Throughout the week, a number of special sessions highlighted key issues, ranging from achieving universal coverage, to "Looking to the Future—the Epidemic in 2031 and New Directions in AIDS Research." Other special sessions explored evidence-based approaches to addressing stigma and discrimination; HIV travel restrictions; health systems strengthening; operations research; HIV prevention; and the global financial architecture for HIV/AIDS.

For the first time, the conference offered six region-specific sessions. Each session featured a range of experts who helped frame a discussion of key issues facing that particular region.

As AIDS 2008 drew to a close, HIV experts from around the world highlighted the dramatic negative impact that stigma and the

denial of human rights, including gender inequality, continue to have on the effectiveness of HIV treatment and prevention scale up.

"The voices of those who bear the brunt of this pandemic have been loud and clear in Mexico City this week," said Pedro Cahn, International Co-Chair of AIDS 2008 and President of the International AIDS Society. "If the world does not heed the call to ensure the human rights and dignity of every person affected by HIV, we will not achieve our goal of universal access."

### **2008 Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic**

In advance of AIDS 2008, the United Nations Joint Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) released the *2008 Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic*. The report highlights specific examples of countries which are seeing changes in sexual behaviour followed by declines in the number of new HIV infections. However, the report also shows that despite the declines in new HIV infections the AIDS epidemic is far from over and that rates of new HIV infections are rising in many countries. AIDS also continues to be the leading cause of death in Africa. It is available online: ([www.unaids.org/en/KnowledgeCentre/HIVData/GlobalReport/2008/2008\\_Global\\_report.asp](http://www.unaids.org/en/KnowledgeCentre/HIVData/GlobalReport/2008/2008_Global_report.asp)).

During AIDS 2008, the 8,000 square metre Global Village provided a platform for open and active discussions that highlighted grassroots stories along with the challenges that communities face and opportunities to improve their response to the epidemic. The Village also provided a space to share knowledge and skills, build coalitions, and promote interactive learning among communities living with and affected by HIV and AIDS.

The Youth Programme, established in 2004, empowers young people by encouraging youth – including youth living with HIV – to help plan, participate in and benefit from the conference. At this year's conference, youth advocated for current and critical issues affecting youth worldwide and further pinpointed current strategies for effective change. Activities included a youth pre-conference, a youth website, a youth reception, a youth pavilion, outreach activities, cultural activities related to youth, sessions and workshops. A youth journalist team covered the conference through writing, blogging, podcasting, photography and video. Further information is available online: (<http://youthaids2008.org/en/sitemap.html>).

The International AIDS Conference is held every two years and is organized by the International AIDS Society—the world's leading independent association of HIV professionals with more than 10,000 members from 172 countries—together with a series of partners including UNAIDS. The next conference will be in Vienna (Austria) in July 2010.

Contact: UNAIDS, 20 avenue Appia, CH-1211 Geneva 27, Switzerland, telephone +41-22/791 3666, fax +41-22/791 4187 website ([www.unaids.org](http://www.unaids.org)) and ([www.aids2008.org](http://www.aids2008.org)).

# WHO: HEALTH EQUITY THROUGH ACTION ON THE SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH

***The World Health Organization's (WHO) Commission on Social Determinants of Health (CSDH) has launched its report, Closing the gap in a generation: Health equity through action on the social determinants of health, which finds that many of the differences in health between – and within – countries result from the social environment where people are born, live, grow, work and age.***

WHO's Commission on Social Determinants of Health, made up of an eminent group of policy makers, academics, former Heads of State and former ministers of health, led a three-year investigation on the social determinants of health (which include unemployment, unsafe workplaces, urban slums, globalization and lack of access to health systems) in order to compile evidence and make recommendations on reducing health inequities.

The report finds that inequities are killing people on a "grand scale." A child born in a Glasgow, Scotland suburb can expect a life 28 years shorter than another living only 13 kilometres away. A girl in Lesotho is likely to live 42 years less than another in Japan. In Sweden, the risk of a woman dying during pregnancy and childbirth is 1 in 17,400; in Afghanistan, the odds are 1 in 8. In the United States, 886,202 deaths would have been averted between 1991 and 2000 if mortality rates between white and African Americans were equalized. Biology does not explain any of this. Instead, the differences between – and within – countries result from the social environment where people are born, live, grow, work and age.

"(The) toxic combination of bad policies, economics, and politics is, in large measure responsible for the fact that a majority of people in the world do not enjoy the good health that is biologically possible," the Commissioners write in their report. "Social injustice is killing people on a grand scale."

Economic growth is raising incomes in many countries but increasing national wealth alone does not necessarily increase national health, the report finds. Without equitable distribution of benefits, national growth can even exacerbate inequities.

Much of the work to redress health inequities lies beyond the health sector. According to the Commission's report, "Water-borne diseases are not caused by a lack of antibiotics but by dirty water, and by the political, social, and economic forces that fail to make clean water available to all; heart disease is caused not by a lack of coronary care units but by lives people lead, which are shaped by the environments in which they live; obesity is not caused by moral failure on the part of individuals but by the excess availability of high-fat and high-sugar foods." Consequently, the health sector – globally and nationally – needs to focus attention on addressing the root causes of inequities in health, the Commission urges.

WHO Director General Margaret Chan noted that health systems will not naturally gravitate towards equity: "Unprecedented leadership is needed that compels all actors, including those beyond the health sector, to examine their impact on health. Primary health care, which integrates health in all of government's policies, is the best framework for doing so."

The Commission makes three overarching recommendations to tackle the "corrosive effects of inequality of life chances."

1. Improve daily living conditions, including the circumstances in which people are born, grow, live, work and age. The Commission recommends that countries set up an interagency mechanism to ensure effective collaboration and coherent policy between all sectors for early childhood development, and aim to provide early childhood services to all of their young citizens. The Commission's report pays particular attention to the increasing numbers of people who live in urban slums, and the impact of urban governance on health. The report also highlights how over 100 million people are impoverished due to paying for health care – a key contributor to health inequity. The Commission thus calls for health systems to be based on principles of equity, disease prevention and health promotion with universal coverage, based on primary health care.

2. Tackle the inequitable distribution of power, money and resources – the structural drivers of those conditions – globally, nationally and locally. The report foregrounds a range of recommendations aimed at ensuring fair financing, corporate social responsibility, gender equity and better governance. These include using health equity as an indicator of government performance and overall social development, the widespread use of health equity impact assessments, ensuring that rich countries honour their commitment to provide 0.7% of their gross national product as aid, strengthening legislation to prohibit discrimination by gender and improving the capacity for all groups in society to participate in policy making with space for civil society to work unencumbered to promote and protect political and social rights.

3. Measure and understand the problem and assess the impact of action. At the global level, the Commission recommends that health equity should be a core development goal and that a social determinants of health framework should be used to monitor progress. The Commission also highlights how implementing any of the above recommendations requires measurement of the existing problem of health inequity (where in many countries adequate data does not exist) and then monitoring the impact on health equity of the proposed interventions. To do this will require firstly investing in basic vital registration systems which have seen limited progress in the last thirty years. There is also a great need for training of policy-makers, health workers and workers in other sectors to understand the need for and how to act on the social determinants of health.

Contact: Sharad Agarwal, Communications Officer, WHO, 20 avenue Appia, CH-1211 Geneva 27, Switzerland, telephone +41-22/791 1905, e-mail <agarwals@who.int>, website ([www.who.int/social\\_determinants/final\\_report/en/index.html](http://www.who.int/social_determinants/final_report/en/index.html)).

# UNFPA: SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION 1325 AND THE ICPD IN HUMANITARIAN SETTINGS

*There are many facets of Security Council resolution 1325 that make it a historic resolution, and one that continues to motivate activism among women's organizations as well as promote policy reform around the world. The broad scope of the resolution includes support for women's role in conflict resolution and peacebuilding, as well as women's active decision making during resettlement, reintegration, post-conflict reconstruction.*

Other, important aspects of the resolution relate to the protection of civilians during conflict. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) programming focuses on this area, and in the spirit of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), this includes programming to prevent and respond to gender-based violence (GBV), to ensure reproductive health services in refugee settings and gender-sensitive post-conflict reconstruction.

## **Open Debate on Security Council Resolution 1325**

In October 2008, as the Security Council engages in its annual open debate on Security Council resolution 1325, there will be an opportunity to review progress made over the past eight years. While there is still much to do in terms of promoting women's rights in conflict, supporting access to reproductive health care and ensuring that post-conflict reconstruction considers women's reproductive health rights and services, there are already many advances to celebrate.

The President of the Security Council, through Presidential Statement S/PRST/2007/40, has requested the UN Secretary-General to prepare a follow-up report on the full implementation of Security Council resolution 1325, incorporating information on the impact of armed conflicts on women and girls in situations that are on the agenda of the Council, and also information on their protection and on the enhancement of their role in peace processes. The report was submitted to the Security Council in October 2008.

From 20-31 October 2008, a photography exhibition entitled "A Global Crescendo: Women's Voices from Conflict Zones," was held allowing women in conflict-affected countries to document their lives through photography, advocate for themselves and make their voices heard.

The project and exhibition represent some of the ways that the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and writer/photographer Ann Jones help support women and advance the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325.

The exhibition was made possible with the cooperation of the Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and UNIFEM.

## **Civilian Protection and GBV Policies and Programming**

"All necessary measures should be taken to ensure the physical protection of refugees – in particular, that of refugee women and refugee children – especially against exploitation, abuse and all forms of violence." – ICPD, 10.24

In June 2006, more than 250 participants from 30 countries met in Brussels for the International Symposium on Sexual Violence in Conflict and Beyond. The three-day conference brought together a range of humanitarian actors and decision-makers to share experiences and to demonstrate

a renewed commitment to end sexual violence in war-torn countries. On the final day, participants signed on to a "Call to Action" that tasks decision-makers and others with ensuring that sexual violence is prioritized in all humanitarian, peacebuilding and recovery efforts. UNFPA is heeding this call by ensuring that sexual violence interventions are included in humanitarian response, training on sexual violence prevention and response, and working on the global level to strengthen advocacy and programming to effectively address sexual violence in conflict.

At the national level, UNFPA supports the development of and follow-up action on plans for addressing gender-based violence. In Liberia, funding and support to the Ministry of Gender (MoG) resulted in GBV being taken up within the highest levels of government, as a core responsibility of the MoG; in Cote d'Ivoire, a National Committee for the Fight against GBV was formed to carry out core actions under their national plan; and in Sudan, as a result of the UNFPA-supported GBV Coordination Committees working in Darfur, support is being provided to the Ministry of Justice Unit to Combat Violence against Women and Children as well as State level Wali Advisors to realize a national action plan for reducing impunity, increasing security and ensuring services for survivors.

UNFPA also supports national and regional dialogue to promote gender and GBV issues. In Colombia, UNFPA's advocacy on GBV issues resulted in improved policies for women, including a law on the prevention of GBV and legal enforcement for perpetrators of rape. In 2006, UNFPA co-supported the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (IC/GLR) for the review and validation by the member States of the GLR of draft model legislations on the Prevention and Suppression of Sexual Violence against Women and Children. UNFPA also co-sponsored the Regional High-Level Consultation on Eradicating Sexual Violence and Ending Impunity in the Great Lakes Region in order to raise awareness around the Protocol on Prevention and Suppression of Sexual Violence Against Women and Children and its related model of legislation. The meeting also sought to project and to identify entry points for the domestication and implementation of the protocol. In Nepal, UNFPA is the lead agency on the implementation of SCR 1325, particularly as related to GBV, working closely with government and national partners carrying out research on SGBV, and sensitizing the population on GBV in conflict situations by distributing booklets and developing media kits.

## **Comprehensive Reproductive Health in Refugee Settings**

"Adequate international support should be extended to countries of asylum to meet the basic needs of refugees and to assist in the search for durable solutions. Refugee populations should be assisted in achieving self-sufficiency. Refugees, particularly refugee women, should be involved in the planning of refugee assistance activities and in their implementation. In planning and implementing refugee

assistance activities, special attention should be given to the specific needs of refugee women and refugee children. Refugees should be provided with access to adequate accommodation, education, health services, including family planning, and other necessary social services.” – ICPD, 10.25

UNFPA works in humanitarian settings to increase the availability of and access to high quality sexual and reproductive health services for women, men, adolescents and young people, as well as victims of war and crisis, in areas of safe motherhood, family planning and sexual violence. During an acute emergency, this often requires procurement and distribution of emergency reproductive health kits, often through ministries of health and humanitarian NGOs. The emergency assistance is supplemented with training for health staff and support for rebuilding stronger reproductive health services through the recovery and into post-conflict reconstruction. Community involvement, including outreach to community decision makers, women or reproductive age and midwives, increases the effectiveness of this programming while increasing awareness and demand for reproductive health services. UNFPA supports emergency reproductive health projects in more than 30 countries worldwide.

#### ***Women and Youth's Participation in Conflict Settings***

Involving youth in the development of programming is also particularly important in UNFPA's work. The voices of some 1,700 children and young people in 92 countries (including Afghanistan, Angola, Burundi, Colombia, Haiti, Iraq, Liberia, Nepal, the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Rwanda, Somalia, Sudan and many others) were brought together in a report entitled *Will You Listen? Young Voices from Conflict Zones*. This report, published by UNFPA, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and others partners, was a companion to the 10-year follow-up report to the landmark UN report *The Impact of Armed Conflict on Children*, widely known as the Graça Machel study.

Working with and talking to local women and women's groups helps to determine local needs which will empower women. For example, in Sudan, consultations with women's groups led to the development of dignity kits for the emergency response there. With these supplies, women are able to remain engaged in the public sphere, going to food distributions to feed their families and participating in training programmes that allow them to build their household livelihoods.

The loss of male breadwinners has created a new group of vulnerable women in Sri Lanka, with approximately 30,000 female-headed families in the north and east of Sri Lanka. In response, and in addition to providing comprehensive reproductive health (RH) services in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps, UNFPA is working to increase the participation of women in the decision-making processes of programme design and implementation. Women leaders receive training and support to participate in regular meetings and the Women's Caucus at the national Parliament. A concrete result of these meetings is funding for women's shelters being built in the conflict-affected northern region of the country.

#### ***Post-conflict Recovery and Uniformed Forces***

During post-conflict recovery, and in addition to supporting sustainable reproductive health services, UNFPA focuses on HIV/AIDS with broader reproductive health and security sector programming. With the increased involvement of women in uniformed services around the world, and through long-term advocacy campaigns, many UNFPA programmes, especially in Latin America, have been able to include strong gender components into their HIV/AIDS and training programmes for uniformed forces. Training for police officers and army officials focus on protection of women and girls' rights, including the right to reproductive health and protection from HIV infection.

UNFPA also supports Demobilization, Disarmament and Reintegration (DDR) in Cote d'Ivoire, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Sudan (with potential for expansion into DRC, Uganda, Nepal and Haiti). These programmes have focused on providing RH services for women and young girls, protecting vulnerable groups against sexual and gender-based violence, raising awareness on HIV/AIDS among young people, and providing sexually transmitted infection (STI) treatment, psychosocial/counselling services and livelihood skills training for ex-combatants and women associated with armed groups.

*Contact: Maha Muna, Humanitarian Response Branch Specialist, UNFPA, 11 Chemin des Anemones, 6th floor, CH-1219 Geneva, Switzerland, telephone +41-22/917 8313, fax +41-22/917 8016, e-mail <elmuna@unfpa.org>, website (www.unfpa.org).*

#### **Contact**

Address correspondence to:  
The Editor, Go Between  
NGLS, Palais des Nations  
CH-1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland  
fax +41-22/917 0432 - e-mail <ngls@unctad.org>

NGLS office in New York:  
NGLS  
United Nations, Room DC1-1106  
New York NY 10017, USA  
fax +1-212/963 8712 - e-mail <ngls@un.org>

**www.un-ngls.org**

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## *Bringing Democracy to the United Nations*

*H.E. Father Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann, President of the 63rd Session of the General Assembly*

On 16 September, I assumed the Presidency of the General Assembly. As an old man, a priest and someone who did not seek this post, I was surprised to be elected by all 192 Member States. I come to the Assembly acutely aware of the sorry state of the world and the inescapable fact that the United Nations has not fulfilled the mandates clearly outlined in its Charter 63 years ago. With this defining concern in mind, I have dedicated my presidency to the poor and oppressed of the world.

There are many reasons for our spectacular failures, but it is clear that our "mad selfishness", as Tolstoy described it, is still very much at work. I believe that this is at the heart of the matter. And there is growing awareness that we cannot continue with business as usual.

The General Debate of the Assembly ended on 29 September after 111 Heads of State and Government addressed what can be called the global village's town meeting. The Assembly is, after all, the most representative body of any international organization in history.

In my address to world leaders, I was frank: The Assembly has not been fulfilling its mandate as outlined in the Charter. And because of this, the United Nations as a whole has been unable to meet its obligations entrusted to it by the peoples of the world.

Over the decades, the central role of the General Assembly in the UN system has been undermined, its authority has been diverted to other bodies, and its resolutions have become toothless and tired. Some of its important functions have fallen into disuse.

I asked our leaders: What good is the Assembly's magnificent democratic structure if our votes, often reflecting the vast majority of nations, are ignored?

How can we continue to tolerate the behavior of some Permanent Members of the Security Council that so often contradicts the spirit and the letter of the Charter which they are obligated to uphold and defend?

Can we continue to accept the domination of the Bretton Woods institutions by the US and Europe when their economic and social policies so often contribute to the poverty we are struggling to overcome?

In short, I believe that the Assembly must vigorously resist the marginalization in the economic and social spheres and take immediate steps to reestablish its credibility and authority. To achieve this, we need some serious changes. For this reason I have made the democratization of the United Nations a priority of the 63rd Session.

Business as usual has produced a world in shameful disarray. After 63 years, we have not made violent conflicts, war, genocide and mutually assured destruction the distant nightmares of another century. The trillion dollars spent each year on arms is but one shocking example of our wrong-headed priorities. Wars of aggression, the worst form of terrorism, are another.

There is no one in the world who does not claim to want to end poverty. But world leaders stand by while half the world's population continues to live in unending deprivation. With the world on the brink of financial catastrophe as the result of greed and corruption, soaring food and energy prices and shrinking development assistance are plunging many millions more into poverty each day. We must immediately move to prevent the food crisis from becoming an ongoing catastrophe for hundreds of millions of people.

We have created an extraordinary body of international law, yet justice is still a rare commodity in much of the world. After 60 years, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as inspiring as always, is cynically defied mostly by States – both large and small.

And, as we willfully tip our environment into toxic destruction, leaders cannot summon the will to curb the mind-boggling consumerism that fuels climate change for fear of losing public support and hefty profits. Let us again become stewards of this world and its precious life.

The United Nations is an ongoing experiment in partnership. Let's inspire these partnerships with solidarity and compassion. The trigger for this solidarity does not lie with world leaders. Nor government bureaucracies. Nor the corporations. It comes from people, from civil society, from ordinary citizens doing extraordinary things.

As activist representatives of civil society, I appeal to you all to embrace one certain truth: that we are all brothers and sisters. With this in mind, our work can be inspired and driven by a new sense of solidarity with each other and the billions of people who are looking to us to assure their well being.

As president of this Assembly, I am working as an agent of change so that we can, together, restore the vitality and relevance of this Assembly and push for the democratization of our international institutions as never before.

Some of this work is underway. In September, world leaders gathered to advance the special needs of Africa and undertook a day of inter-active dialogue to reaffirm our commitments to the Millennium Development Goals. Both of these high-level meetings lead into the Doha meeting on increasing financing for development at the end of November. These are the building blocks of a strong campaign against poverty.

I look to the support of civil society organizations around the world to give us the energy, the passion and the political will to return the United Nations to its peoples around the world. I am counting on you.