

Intervention on Freedom from Want, MDG 1-7

UNs Civil Society Hearing, June 23 2005

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Thank you for allowing me to take your time.

[I do belong to a national NGO, the United Nations Association of Denmark, but during my five minutes I will also reflect a few of the points raised by other Danish NGOs, by other UNAs of the world, by networks in the North and the South whom we are working with, especially Sustainability Watch, and most importantly: points raised during a meeting of NGOs earlier this month in Copenhagen, gathering some 100 persons from 37 countries – the majority from the South - preparing the Millennium+5 Meeting in September.]

[As time is of the essence, let us not waste it].

Let me start with poverty. We often talk of poverty without acknowledging poverty's link to excess. Neither is this link mentioned in the GA Presidents draft.

Poverty as well as excess is the result of inequalities. More than just unequal distribution of income, poverty has its source in an unequal distribution of assets, affordable access to social services and opportunities, and is furthermore rooted in marginalisation due to ethnicity, gender and class and lack of political participation and information.

The accumulation of wealth and power by a few individuals, strong nations and multinational corporations leads to poverty. The rapid non-transparent transfer of power from governments to corporations requires global governance with binding and enforceable rules. The draft outcome text should include the suggestion to set up the process to negotiate a framework convention on corporate accountability, as discussed during the Johannesburg Summit.

Economic growth is not in itself the only solution to eradicating poverty, as the official understanding and promotion of growth prioritizes growth over equity, rights and sustainable development. Nor is the surplus created through growth distributed equally. Redistribution of not just income but also other resources can be part of the solution, but for instance the present hopelessly inadequate national taxation-systems in many countries cannot even remotely remedy this inequality. External financial support cannot substitute anti-poverty strategies such as employment, land reform, and policies to promote the position of women.

The MDGs can be used as a supplementary tool in addressing not only poverty but also other challenges facing us. Making a short-list of immediate challenges obviously leaves out other issues, but it is a mistake to omit reproductive and sexual rights, health and services; this should be included as a new target under MDG 5 [because this issue area is necessary to combat poverty, violence against women and HIV/Aids and other infectious diseases]. Also omitted from the MDGs is the crucial importance of gender equality and women's empowerment as a crosscutting issue for achieving sustainable development, the protection of human rights, peace and security. [The ICPD Programme of Action (1994), Beijing Program of Action (1995), the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), and other UN plans of action must be used as the basis for the work.] Special emphasis should be put on integrating the ICPD goals of universal access to reproductive health by 2015 into strategies to attain the MDGs.

We are highly concerned about the very little mentioning of sustainable development in the draft outcome text. Regarding MDG 7, sustainable development should be mainstreamed across all MDGs. Furthermore, we suggest to include the MDG7 Plus among the official MDG targets and indicators to better reflect the outcome of the Johannesburg Summit, [including targets for restoring near-depleted fish stocks, reverse loss of biodiversity, establishing a representative network of marine protected areas, increase share of renewable energy and the phase out of harmful chemicals]; and to establish the link between sustainable policies, national poverty reduction plans and their budgeting processes with all MDGs and MDG 7 Plus targets and implementations.

Environmental destruction has the greatest impact on the poor, especially women and children, who are the most vulnerable, and the related effects have a higher death toll than terrorism. Security has to do with human and environmental concerns primarily and not terrorism. We therefore call for a World Summit on Human and Environmental Security in 2010.

Finally on the MDGs, education must be seen in a broader sense, looking further than being implicitly content with teaching the basic skills – it is about learning for life. [Learning for life starts after being taught the basics and includes quality and relevance of, equality and access to and full participation in education for women, men, girls and boys.] We must from 2005 onwards remember the decade for education for sustainable development (ESD) and the inclusion of ESD in any relevant curriculum. Thus learning can contribute to the creation of an active citizenship, an indispensable component of democratic societies based on sustainable production and consumption.

Which brings me to my last section on involvement of civil society.

I do not always agree with the views propagated by the present government in my country, but during the opening of the international Copenhagen NGO-meeting earlier this month [sponsored by the Danish government], our minister for development co-operation [Ms Ulla Toernaes] urged us to make our voices heard. That is a very valid recommendation. Globalisation stretches government's capacities beyond limits and borders, and only through the active co-operation on all levels with civil society can the tasks at hand be addressed. Therefore it is so very strange to witness the process devised in connection to the September-meeting, and to read para 102 in the Presidents draft. Someone is out of touch with reality.

To reconnect to reality I urge everyone present to bring these discussions back home, and for governments to interact with their national NGOs in order to establish the best possible platform of knowledge, resources and commitment needed to not only ensure a successful meeting in September but more importantly: to at least obtain the implementation on the ground of the 8 MDGs.

Thank you.