

## **THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS**

*A Joint Statement by the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the UN Commission on Human Rights' Special Rapporteurs on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights(29 November 2002)*

1. The Millennium Declaration sets the United Nations (UN) agenda for peace, security and development concerns in the 21st Century, including in the areas of environment, human rights, and governance. The General Assembly called upon the whole UN system to assist Member States in the implementation of this Declaration<sup>1\*</sup>. In order to guide the UN system in this task, the Secretary-General prepared a “road-map” for implementing goals, including Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Millennium Human Rights Goals, related to the Declaration.<sup>2</sup>

2. Recently, during the presentation of his first annual progress report on implementing the Millennium Declaration, the UN Secretary-General warned that prospects for reaching the MDGs on current trends are uncertain, with marked differences between and within regions. He also stressed that insufficient progress was being made in meeting the broader objectives of the declaration, such as human rights, democracy and good governance.<sup>3</sup>

3. We believe that chances for attaining Millennium Development Goals will improve if all UN agencies and governments adopt a comprehensive human rights approach to realizing the MDGs, including in the formulation of the corresponding indicators.

4. The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) and Commission on Human Rights' Special Rapporteurs on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights believe that human rights, including economic, social and cultural rights help to realize any strategy to meet the MDGs for example by:

- (i) providing a compelling normative framework, underpinned by universally recognized human values and reinforced by legal obligations, for the formulation of national and international development policies towards achieving the MDGs ;
- (ii) raising the level of empowerment and participation of individuals;
- (iii) Affirming the accountability of various stakeholders, including international organizations and NGOs, donors and transnational corporations, vis-à-vis people affected by problems related to poverty, hunger, education, gender inequality, health, housing and safe drinking water; and
- (iv) reinforcing the twin principles of global equity and shared responsibility which are the very foundation for the Millennium Declaration.

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<sup>1</sup> RES/2002/69, 25 April 2002, paragraphs 5 and 6.

<sup>2</sup> A/RES/56/95. The “road-map” contains a list of goals for each chapter of the Declaration, including eight Millennium Development Goals and six Millennium Human Rights Goals (See Annex 1)

<sup>3</sup> SG/2079, DEV/2397, 1 October 2002. See also Report of the Secretary-General, *Implementation of the United Nations Millennium Declaration*, A/57/270, 31 July 2002.

5. Economic, social and cultural rights provide principles and operational strategies to address the problems which are at the centre of the MDGs: poverty, hunger, slum dwellers, education, gender inequality and disempowerment of women, child mortality, maternal illhealth, HIV/AIDS, and other communicable diseases, the need for environmental sustainability, including safe drinking water. Economic, social and cultural rights should be the criteria when establishing tools for measuring progress towards the achievement of MDGs. The concepts of progressive realization and resource availability enshrined in the ICESCR are important guidelines of any strategy which aims at meeting the MDGs.<sup>4</sup>

6. It is therefore manifest that within their respective mandates, the CESCR and UN Special Rapporteurs on economic, social and cultural rights<sup>5</sup> contribute to the UN monitoring of the implementation of the Millennium Declaration and the MDGs. The CESCR and the Commission on Human Rights' Special Rapporteurs on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights welcome the recognition by the Commission on Human Rights of "the need for effective implementation and fulfillment of ...the Millennium Declaration"<sup>6</sup>, and hope that the UN Commission on Human Rights will give attention to the Millennium Declaration Goals as set out in the "road map" in its relevant mandates.

7. By proclaiming their adherence to the ICESCR, states have agreed to establish systems of analysis and monitoring to assist them in implementing their human rights obligations. 145 countries are now legally bound by the ICESCR and report to the CESCR on a regular basis. The reporting process is undertaken as a face-to-face "constructive dialogue" between the Committee and States parties. The task of the Committee is to assess the achievements of the reporting State as well as to offer guidance on the implementation of its treaty commitments. In its dialogue with states, the CESCR develops operational approaches. For example, it seeks information on whether the State has developed a short-term and medium-term plan to improve the health and living standards of the poorest, and on progress made in the control of endemic diseases, especially in the poorest areas of the country. The Committee seeks expert advice from specialized agencies in defining appropriate indicators and will then discuss the appropriate national benchmarks, which may vary according to respective country strategies.<sup>7</sup>

8. The Committee also offers guidance on the interpretation and implementation of specific rights through General Comments on for example health, education, housing,

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<sup>4</sup> The Draft Guidelines on a Human Rights Approach to Poverty Reduction Strategies prepared by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), following a request of the CESCR, illustrate the inextricable link between the realization of human rights and the implementation of the MDGs ([www.unhchr.ch/development/poverty.html](http://www.unhchr.ch/development/poverty.html)).

<sup>5</sup> Information on their respective mandates is available from [www.unhchr.ch/](http://www.unhchr.ch/)

<sup>6</sup> E/CN.4/RES/2002/69 of 25 April 2002, paragraphs 5 and 6.

<sup>7</sup> This dialogue makes possible a more active involvement of the specialized agencies and the international financial institutions in defining indicators and providing measurable criteria of progress in the enjoyment of these human rights.

food and water. The ICESCR and other human rights treaties, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on the Rights of the child (CRC) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD), prohibit discrimination on the basis of gender and other forms, and progress in this area is also reviewed in the reporting system.

9. In parallel to the treaty system, the UN Human Rights Commission developed its own special reporting procedures, including the appointment of independent experts and special rapporteurs with mandates to collect and analyze information. Many of these mandates establish the link between human rights and development, including those on education, food, housing, health, environmental protection and wider issues such as the right to development, human rights and extreme poverty and structural adjustment programmes.

10. Relevant special rapporteurs and independent experts monitor progress towards the realization of economic, social and cultural rights, through country visits, normative and conceptual work and its operationalization through relevant indicators, and consultations with development practitioners, including the international financial institutions, UN system, donor community and civil society, and analyze obstacles in their annual reports to the Commission on Human Rights.

11. The CESCR and Commission on Human Rights' Special Rapporteurs on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights consider therefore that their mandates-related activities need to be integrated into the on-going work of the UN for implementing the Millennium Development Goals, including the Millennium Project and Millennium Campaign.

12. We encourage all relevant actors, including governments and UN agencies, in their work on the MDGs to ensure that the definition of indicators and the setting of benchmarks are consistent with the existing and voluntarily accepted obligations of States under the international human rights instruments.

13. 147 Heads of States and Governments – 190 Nations in total – committed in the Millennium Declaration to the realization of human rights, the promotion of sustained development and the elimination of extreme poverty. We strongly believe that the two sets of commitments are interdependent and mutually reinforcing.

14. The CESCR and Commission on Human Rights' Special Rapporteurs on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights welcome the current UN endeavor for operationalizing the MDGs. We stand ready to assist and contribute to this process through the respective functions of our mandates.

## Annex 1<sup>8</sup>

### **The Millennium Human Rights Goals**

*Goal 1:* To respect and fully uphold the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and strive for the full protection and promotion in all countries of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights for all; *goal 2:* To strengthen the capacity of all our countries to implement the principles and practices of democracy and human rights, including minority rights; *goal 3:* To combat all forms of violence against women and to implement the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; *goal 4:* To take measures to ensure respect for and the protection of the human rights of migrants, migrant workers and their families, to eliminate the increasing acts of racism and xenophobia in many societies, and to promote greater harmony and tolerance in all societies; *goal 5:* To work collectively for more inclusive political processes, allowing genuine participation by all citizens in all our countries; *goal 6:* To ensure the freedom of the media to perform their essential role and the right of the public to have access to information

### **The Millennium Development Goals**

*Goal 1:* Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; *Goal 2:* Achieve universal primary education; *Goal 3:* Promote gender equality and empower women; *Goal 4:* Reduce child mortality; *Goal 5:* Improve maternal health; *Goal 6:* Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; *Goal 7:* Ensure environmental sustainability; *Goal 8:* Develop a global partnership for development.

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<sup>8</sup> See Roadmap towards the implementation of the United Nations Millennium Declaration: Report of the Secretary General to the General Assembly September 2001, A/56/326, 59 pages.